



BLUE AND GRAY

WEEKLY



Stories of Brave Northern and Southern Boys in the Civil War.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1904, by Frank Touzey, 24 Union Square, New York.

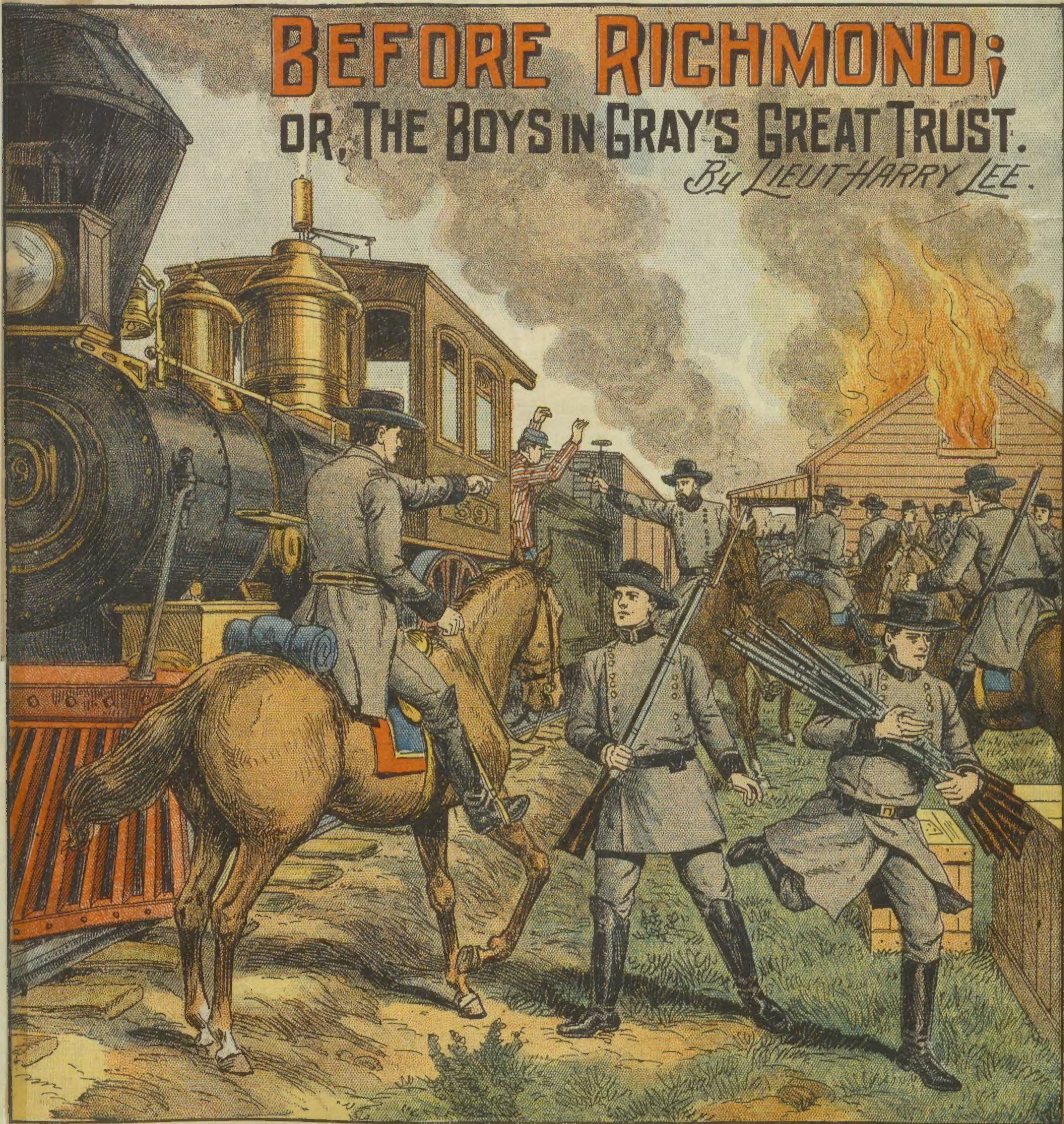
No. 22.

NEW YORK, JANUARY 6, 1905.

Price 5 Cents.

BEFORE RICHMOND; OR, THE BOYS IN GRAY'S GREAT TRUST.

By LIEUT HARRY LEE.



The train and its valuable supplies was captured. The engineer was covered by a pistol in General Stuart's hand, so that he dared make no further attempt at escape. Will Prentiss felt that the Grays had won a great triumph.

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BEFORE RICHMOND;

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By LIEUT. HARRY LEE.

CHAPTER I.

THE BATTLE OF MALVERN HILL.

Early on the morning of the first of July, 1862, the great army of the Potomac, under McClellan, had reached Malvern Hill, where the last stand was made in that most thrilling retreat from Mechanicsville to Harrison's Landing.

For five days there had been constant fighting along the rear of the retreating army.

Jackson and Lee, Longstreet and Hill had hammered and thundered in vain at the Union line in the attempt to break it and force a general rout.

Now, however, when within striking distance of Harrison's Landing, where they would gain the aid of the Union gunboats, the great army of McClellan made a desperate stand.

On Malvern Hill they posted their tiers of batteries, and hastily dug trenches, soon making the position almost impregnable.

Against this veritable Gibraltar, Lee with rash determination hurled the forces of Magruder and Hill in a vain effort to overwhelm the rearguard of the retreating army. On the slopes of Malvern Hill thousands of brave men, much of the flower of the South, gave up their lives freely and nobly.

Foremost in this action was a company of Richmond youths, who styled themselves the Virginia Grays. Brave and fearless they were, and led by Captain Will Prentiss, the son of one of President Davis' most valued advisers.

The Virginia Grays were an independent volunteer organization. So nobly had they distinguished themselves that all of the great Confederate generals knew them well, and reposed the utmost confidence in them. In many a scouting excursion or on special service the Grays had won success and fame.

Through these six days' battles they had fought well. They had lost many of their brave boys, but their ranks had been almost instantly recruited. There were plenty of boys in Richmond only looking for the chance to enlist.

It happened that the Grays, having been with Jackson the previous day, now were detailed to fill a position in the skirmish line of Magruder, on the Union right.

The Grays deployed and advanced pluckily under a hot fire to the very base of the battery-crowned hill.

Here they were unable to advance further, for the fire of the Union defence was too murderous. They fell back to allow the main line of attack to move up.

Forward came the charging columns of Hill. A handsome appearance they made, those long lines of gray, as they moved rapidly up that deadly slope.

"It is too bad," said Lieutenant Fred Randolph to Cap-

tain Will Prentiss. "It seems to me that it is a great mistake."

Will shook his head.

"Few of them will come back alive," he said.

"Yet General Lee deems it very important to capture the hill."

"Yes," agreed Will. "If the enemy could be driven from Malvern, a most absolute defeat would result for them. But I do not see how they can be dislodged. Look yonder! See that line of guns which our boys are now almost upon. They will capture that line of defence—but see! there is another line of guns beyond it, and yet another beyond that! See! What did I tell you? Hurrah! Hurrah!"

Will swung his cap and cheered. Fred Randolph did the same. There was excellent reason for this.

The brave line of gray, though their ranks were torn by shell and musketry fire, had gone over the breastworks and were in the first line of trenches.

But Will's prediction was quickly verified. The victory was but transient.

The second line of defence now opened its tier of guns. The fire which swept down that hillside was awful.

Nothing human could hope to stand before it.

The shattered fragments of Hill's regiments came rushing back, panic-stricken. The repulse was frightful to witness.

Now there came a lull in the battle. The Virginia Grays were awaiting orders, when suddenly an orderly galloped up and gave Will a salute.

"Captain Prentiss?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Will.

"General Magruder wants you to report to him at once."

"All right, sir."

Will sprang upon his horse and galloped along the line. He passed serried ranks of gray, solid columns of men, whose bayonets glittered in the mid-day light. It seemed like an irresistible avalanche of steel which was about to launch itself at the Union line.

Will did not at once succeed in finding General Magruder.

But after a sharp ride through the ranks of the regiments he saw a group of officers on a nearby eminence.

As he drew near, the boy captain saw General Magruder standing in the edge of the group of officers with his glass levelled at Malvern.

He saw the commanding figure of General Lee in the center of the group. There were Hill, and Longstreet, and Jackson.

He felt a thrill as he drew near the distinguished group of military leaders, probably as skilled fighters as the world ever saw.

But as he reined in his horse and dismounted, General Magruder turned and caught sight of him.

The Confederate general's face lit up eagerly, and he beckoned to Will to approach. In a few moments the boy captain was standing before him.

The other generals now glanced in his direction, and General Lee smiled and nodded, while General Longstreet exclaimed:

"There is the boy now. If anybody can execute the task we require, he is the one."

"I believe you," said General Lee. "Magruder, I want you to detach Prentiss and his company for special service."

"Very well, general," agreed Magruder. "I will issue the order at once. He is at your disposal."

Will heard all this with tingling veins. The expressions of confidence used by the military commanders regarding him were gratifying in the extreme, and such as to stimulate him to his best endeavor.

"Gentlemen," he said, "so far as my humble ability goes, it shall be devoted to whatever enterprise you may choose to give me."

General Lee advanced and drew from his pocket a map. He unrolled it and held it up, signalling Will to read over his shoulder.

"This is what we want of you, Prentiss," he said. "You will observe that I have marked upon this map the present location of all the armies in Virginia. At present we are concentrated here in McClellan's rear. Now, we have secret information from our spies in Washington, that General Pope, with forty thousand men, is to move on Richmond in our rear. That this retreat of McClellan's is really a feint to draw us away from our capital and enable Pope to strike his decisive blow; that McClellan will turn upon us here and act in co-operation with Pope. This would virtually place us between two fires, and might result in the total defeat and extinction of our army. That would be a dark hour indeed for the South."

Will Prentiss was so deeply impressed with the tremendous possibility, that for a moment he was aghast. Finally, he said:

"What can be done to avert this possible disaster?"

"There is one thing, and one only," said General Lee. "At present Stuart, with ten thousand of our best cavalry, is north of us, near Tunstalls. He has been raiding in the rear of McClellan's army. He is the only obstacle in the path of Pope, should he decide to descend upon us from Fredericksburg, where he is stationed with his so-called Army of Virginia."

"To-day we shall try to beat McClellan so badly, that we may turn back in time to interpose between Pope and his proposed descent upon Richmond. I am telling you all this, so that you may give a verbal report to General Stuart, which is the safest. Do you see?"

Will bowed profoundly.

"I understand it thoroughly, General Lee."

"Very good! Now, what we want you to do, is this: Mount your company on the best horses you can find. Ride around the Union right flank until you can find Stuart."

"Explain to him fully how matters are. He must then ride north to Hanover Court House and burn all bridges, destroy all means of supplies, put every obstacle in the way of an advance by Pope. Do you understand?"

Will drew himself up and saluted.

"I understand perfectly, general."

"Very good! It is a great trust which we are confiding to you, and much depends on how you keep it; perhaps the

fate of the Confederacy. Stuart must make his best stand before Richmond, and hold the enemy back until we can beat McClellan and return."

Will's eyes flashed, and he saluted again. Every inch a soldier he looked at that moment.

"I appreciate the importance and the value of this trust you place in me and my company of Grays," he said. "You may be sure we will safely execute it or die in the attempt."

"You will start at once," said General Lee. Then he turned abruptly, and began giving rapid orders for another advance upon the heights of Malvern.

Certain military critics may have felt it incumbent to deplore the reckless action of Lee in sending his men so repeatedly to the disastrous and futile assault upon the impregnable hill of Malvern.

But the incident above narrated may well explain his conduct. He realized that it was necessary now, if ever, to deal McClellan a terrible defeat.

It was his last opportunity, for with the Army of Virginia, under Pope, menacing Richmond, he could afford to waste but little time.

Stuart, with his mobile body of cavalry, might well be depended upon to throw all sorts of obstacles in the way of Pope, perhaps to delay his march until a sufficient defence of Richmond could be assured.

And to make complete this plan was the mighty trust placed in the hands of Will Prentiss and his Grays. How they executed it, and the thrilling adventures it entailed upon them will furnish the material for our story.

CHAPTER II.

A STARTLING SCENE.

Detailed by General Magruder, by orders from General Lee, the Grays were recalled from the skirmish line. They stacked their muskets, and were given carbines and sabres.

Quickly horses were brought up from the rear, and they were mounted.

It was not the first time they had been in the saddle or upon an expedition similar to this. They were ready to enter upon it with enthusiasm.

As soon as they were mounted they rode away, with Will Prentiss at their head. He had his orders from General Lee thoroughly committed to memory.

The Grays were soon galloping in the rear of the great Confederate army, which had now concentrated in front of Malvern Hill.

Jackson had pursued Franklin from the bridge at the White Oak Swamp, and was now extending his line to the north. All was excitement and confusion. The long lines of gray were rapidly taking up position to partly encircle the hill. Cannons were booming, the rattle of muskets filled the air, and everywhere there was indication of a great battle.

The Grays would have been pleased to remain and par-

ticipate in this. But they had a far more important mission on hand.

Will Prentiss soon had passed beyond the lines of the army. He could now see the country beyond, with its network of roads filled with long lines of white-topped wagons, and detachments of men, mounted and on foot.

A wing guard protected these supply trains on the north. It was not possible for Union cavalry to reach them.

Will led his company beyond this guard. Then he was beyond the lines of his own army entirely.

The country before him was an open one, and it was not long before he had gained a point from which the rear communications of the Union army could be seen.

For miles the long blue line could be seen. It did not require an eye more practised than that of Will Prentiss to see that the trains of McClellan's army were well protected. In all history, perhaps, no more well-conducted retreat, than that of the Army of the Potomac, is known.

Will reflected that, if Stuart and his cavalry were in the vicinity, they would have scant show of capturing any supply-train along this road. They were too well defended.

But it was the object of the young captain of the Grays to find Stuart, whether he was to be found here or even as far north as Tunstalls. It was, of course, impossible to keep track of the cavalry raider with any degree of certainty.

The noon hour had passed. There were still sounds of cannon from Malvern Hill, but the battle did not seem to be so fiercely waged.

The Grays were now miles from their own lines, and yet not far from the Union advance, which was moving toward Harrison's Landing. Will knew well enough the danger of his position.

At any moment they might run across a superior force, or hit upon an ambush, with the risk of capture. He now kept his eyes wide open.

Finally the Grays reached cross-roads which branched in various directions. Here a halt was called.

There was a creek nearby where the horses were watered. They were allowed to graze an hour in a field nearby.

Will Prentiss occupied the time, in company with Fred Randolph, by climbing a nearby hill. From this a good view of the country could be obtained.

They spent some time here scanning the country with a powerful glass. There were visible distant evolutions by the Union forces, which neither understood.

Few troops of horse were seen; none of them were Confederate.

"I tell you, Will," said Fred, with conviction, "we are wasting time here. Stuart is to the north of us, along some of the railroad lines."

"I believe you," agreed Will. "I think this afternoon we will set out for the Chickahominy, and crossing it go north."

"That is my idea. I believe we will run across Stuart in that manner."

"I hope so."

"I am quite eager and excited. Really, it will be ex-

citing enough to ride with Stuart. I hear Lincoln has placed a price on his head."

"Is that true? I tell you, they'll never get Stuart. He is too able a strategist."

"I believe you. I think——" Fred came to a sudden stop. "Mother of Cæsar! what is that?"

Will turned and saw the lieutenant leaning eagerly forward scanning a scene far below. Somewhat surprised and not a little curious, Will turned the glass thither.

What he beheld gave him a thrill.

The scene was a little glade, in the center of which was a cabin. Before the door of this stood a young man. At the distance it could not be told whether he was a Union or Confederate soldier.

But he was the central figure in a most dramatic scene.

Leaning against the door-jamb of the cabin, he was firing the contents of a pistol, apparently, into a clump of trees fifty yards away. His right arm was extended thus, while his left encircled the figure of a young girl, who seemed to be lying against his shoulder in a dead faint.

Suddenly he was seen to reel and fall, the senseless figure of the girl going down with him. Then from the trees emerged the figures of four men.

One of them wore the uniform of a Confederate officer. The others wore tattered uniforms of blue, and seemed to be stragglers or deserters from the Union army.

The next moment the figure of the young girl was raised, and as horses were now brought up, the man in the Confederate uniform mounted and placed the senseless, limp figure of the girl across the saddle-pommel.

The stragglers also mounted and started to ride away, leaving the apparently dead figure of the youth across the threshold.

All this was enacted in much less time than it takes to tell it. Will and Fred were spellbound witnesses.

Not until the villainous party turned to ride away, did Will Prentiss recover himself.

Then he turned with a shout:

"Mount the company, Fred! Send detachments east and west to cut off every road. We must head those rascals off. There is villainy at work here!"

Fred Randolph needed no second bidding. He plunged down the hill at full speed. In another moment the Grays were saddling their horses.

They were quickly mounted, and detachments spread out in all directions.

Will and Fred, however, first started for the cabin in the glade. They had some difficulty in finding it, but finally they came upon a lane which led to the clearing.

They reached the cabin door a moment later. The prostrate figure of the youth lay across it.

His white face, upturned, showed a noble contour, and was handsome, in spite of the blood patches upon it.

Will leaped from his horse and bent down over him. He saw a long, jagged wound across the skull. There was a bullet wound in the hand.

Will placed his ear to the youth's breast. He gave a great cry.

"He is alive, Fred!" he cried. "We will save him!"

"Good!" cried the young lieutenant. "I have some whiskey in my canteen. Just support his head, Will!"

The fiery liquid was poured down the wounded man's throat. It had a most remarkable effect upon him.

He gave a start, opened his eyes, and then wildly essayed to gain his feet. He flashed a startled glance at Will.

"Steady, my friend," said the boy captain. "You will gain nothing by too violent exertion. Keep cool. We are friends, and we will bring you out all right."

"She—where is she?" gasped the wounded youth, huskily. "Don't tell me they have taken her away!"

"See here, my boy," said Will, firmly, "you must understand that nothing is to be gained by violence. You must keep cool and calm. If you get a fever started from that wound on your head, things may go hard with you."

"Man, you are mad!" cried the wounded youth; "how can I stand it when I know she is in their power? Tell me she is safe!"

"She will soon be safe," said Will, positively. "My men will head them off. Now be calm! You are not so badly wounded. But you must be careful!"

The youth gave Will a searching glance. Something seemed to reassure him, for he grew calmer, and asked:

"Who are you?"

"I am Will Prentiss, captain of the Virginia Grays. From a distant hill we saw your battle with those villains, and we came down at once to give you aid."

"Heaven bless you for that! I tried hard to fight them off. But they were too strong in numbers."

"Tell me who they are?"

The wounded youth's head had now been washed and bandaged. The wound had been mainly tearing of the scalp. If the concussion did not induce fever of the brain all would be well.

"Don't you know that scoundrel?" he asked, giving Will a searching look. "He is Wallace Main, the traitor and guerrilla. There is a price upon his head. President Davis will pay a heavy reward for him, dead or alive."

Will Prentiss gave a sharp cry.

"Wallace Main!" he exclaimed. "I have heard much of him. He is one of the worst scoundrels in the South."

"That is what he is!" cried the wounded youth, with a hardening of the jaw. "And I have a reckoning with him which can only be settled by the death of one of us."

"I cannot blame you," said Will. "But would you mind telling me who you are?"

"I am Clyde Osborn," replied the youth. "I left my school to join the North Carolina Volunteers. My home is in Raleigh, where my folks are prominent people. Shortly after coming to Virginia I fell ill, and obtained a furlough. I accepted an invitation from my father's old friend, Hugh Montrose, of Arleigh Plantation, to spend my furlough there and recuperate my health.

"At the plantation, and a trusted friend of Montrose, was this man, Wallace Main. His real character did not become known until he grew jealous of my friendship for Alicia Montrose, the daughter of my host. We had a per-

sonal encounter, he having insulted me. Then I learned that he was a guerrilla and traitor. I exposed him to Mr. Montrose, who ordered him to leave his house.

"The villain left, but he returned a few days later with a troop of his guerrillas, and attacked us. We, a handful of us, held the house for a day and a half against his crew. Then Mr. Montrose was shot. I managed to escape with Alicia under cover of darkness. From a distance we saw the plantation buildings burned. There was no recourse for us but to flee.

"The scoundrel pursued us day and night. I tried in vain to reach the lines of our army. Every effort failed. Finally we were chased to this spot, and I tried to gain the shelter of the cabin. But the door is barred, and they shot me down before I could get cover. They have taken Alicia away! I can't stay here; no matter about the wounds! I must go! Don't restrain me!"

But Will and Fred again restrained the wounded youth.

"Have patience and courage, my young friend," said Will, earnestly. "You can gain nothing by precipitate action. Leave all to us. We will restore her to you. We will hang Main if we catch him!"

By degrees they calmed him, and finally, when a detachment of the Grays returned, he was placed in the saddle, and rode away with Will and Fred on either side of him.

CHAPTER III.

WITH GENERAL STUART.

The story of young Osborn had interested and touched the two young officers of the Grays deeply. While Will did not forget that his first mission was to find General Stuart, he could not resist the impulse to see this great wrong righted, so far as he was able.

Osborn was rapidly regaining his strength and the command of his mental faculties. The wounds he had received were weakening, but it became evident that they would not induce a high degree of fever.

So that before they had gone far, he was able to ride and control his horse unassisted. He grew calmer, and discussed matters in a more philosophical mood.

"We shall be happy to give you all the assistance in our power," said Will. "But we have a very important trust to perform, and that we must hold paramount."

"You are kind indeed," said Osborn. "But for you I would have been in utter despair. But I shall not relinquish my attempt to track down Wallace Main, and avenge if not rescue Alicia!"

"I feel sure that you will succeed," said Will. "We shall help you all we can."

The various detachments sent out to head off the guerrillas now began to come in. All of them but one reported inability to find trace of the villain.

This detachment of five men and a corporal, no other than plucky Sam Payton, had a thrilling report.

"We cut across to the Four Mile Road, Captain Prentiss," said Sam. "I reckoned they might go that way.

We lay in wait in the woods, and suddenly we saw them coming. The girl was no longer in a faint, and rode a horse by herself, to which she was tied.

"When they got near enough we rode out at them. You bet there was a hot fight. We shot down four of their men, but they killed two of our boys. Then while we were fighting, the leader, Main himself, with two or three of his men, and the girl, rode away toward the Chickahominy. We lost them then."

"Turn your horses that way and ride," cried Will. "It is toward Tunstalls where we expect to find Stuart. It will be right in our course."

The Grays all now having returned, at once responded to the call of their young captain, and dashed away. The little troop took a cross-road leading to the spot where Payton had encountered Main and his party.

When they arrived there an examination showed that the prints of the horses' hoofs in the road pointed north.

So the Grays spurred in this direction. For some miles they rode hard. This brought them to the bottom-lands of the Chickahominy River. Will knew from his bearings that they were not far from Bottoms Bridge.

This bridge he knew had been burned by McClellan in his last crossing of the river. But there were fordings at intervals along the river.

This caused the young captain to adopt the theory that Main and his men might be overtaken at one of these fords. For that he would cross the Chickahominy, seemed certain.

Not far from the present spot was a passage of the river, known as Allister's Ford. Will consulted with his lieutenant.

"I think you have the right theory, Will," said Fred. "I wouldn't be surprised if Allister's Ford would be the crossing place for the party."

"Let us go thither!"

At once the Grays took a road leading through the bottom-lands. It was not long before they came to the shallow crossing of the river. It was a lonely spot, but just beyond the river bank a negro cabin was found.

Will applied there for information. An old negro, who answered to the name of Cato, responded:

"I done reckon de gemmen yo' is lookin' fo' crossed yeah about half an hour ago," said the negro. "Dey was jes' as yo' describes dem, wif a lady ridin' wif dem."

"Forward!" cried Will, excitedly. "We are close upon them, boys."

The Grays rode through the ford. But when they reached the opposite shore a problem met them.

Here were three roads diverging. Which road had they taken?

The soil was hardly of a nature to leave a good trail. It was almost impossible to detect the hoof-prints.

Moreover, there were hoof-prints on all the roads. But which belonged to Main and his men it was not easy to say.

However, Will finally decided to take the middle road. This led north. The Grays galloped on.

The day was rapidly waning. It would soon be dark and almost an impossibility to track the party.

Soon the road entered a deep growth of scrub. For several miles this ensued. Then suddenly, around a bend in the road, came a body of horsemen. They were swinging along at full gallop.

At first Will drew rein, and would have drawn his men into the scrub. But a keen glance showed him that the newcomers wore uniforms of gray.

This led him to change his mind, for he knew they must be friends. So he gave orders to the Grays to deploy in two lines, one on each side of the road.

Nearer came the horsemen. They pulled up at sight of the Grays. One of their number, acting as spokesman, cried:

"Hello! What company are you?"

"The Virginia Grays!" replied Will. "Who are you?"

"The Fourth Cavalry," was the reply. "We are detached from General Stuart's command."

A sharp cry escaped Will. He spurred his horse forward.

"Is General Stuart with you?" he asked.

"No," was the reply; "he is with the main body of the cavalry."

"Where is that?"

"Before I answer any more questions," said the officer, suspiciously, "let me ask who you are?"

"I am Captain Will Prentiss, of the Virginia Grays."

"And I am Colonel Tom Garman, of General Stuart's staff."

"I am certainly glad to meet you. I am on special service, and my duty is to see General Stuart."

"Where do you come from?"

"From General Lee, at Malvern Hill."

Colonel Garman gave a great start.

"Ah!" he cried, "then you can bring me news of the main army. What is going on? How goes the battle? We have had no news since the fight at Savage's!"

"The Union army is in full retreat. Part of it is at bay at Malvern Hill, where General Lee hopes to crush it."

"I hope he will succeed. Is the battle going on now?"

"It was when I left there."

"General Stuart will be glad to see you and learn the news. We have been cutting off detachments of McClellan's army, and have ridden as far north as Hanover Court-House."

"Take me to General Stuart as quick as you can," said Will. "I have very important information for him."

Colonel Garman saluted, and said:

"Follow my troop. General Stuart is hardly a mile away."

Garman's troop wheeled, and the Grays now fell in behind. It did not take long to cover the mile.

A farmhouse came suddenly into view. There were great trees in front of it.

About the farmhouse were gathered a large body of horsemen. As Colonel Garman dashed up, Will saw that the fields were dotted with small dog-tents, showing a large encampment.

There might have been five thousand men in the en-

campment. Stuart's full force was double that number, but the wily raider had detachments scouring the country about, so that it was seldom that his command was concentrated.

As Garman's troop drew rein, the Grays did the same. Garman himself dismounted, and Will did the same.

Fred Randolph was left in charge of the Grays. Will followed Garman to a spot where stood several officers. One of these wore a general's shoulder-straps.

"General Stuart," said Colonel Garman, saluting. "A messenger from General Lee."

Stuart turned, and looked Will up and down. Then he gave a start.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed, "it's Captain Will Prentiss."

"General Stuart, I am glad to see you."

They shook hands warmly. The Confederate cavalry leader was very cordial.

"I am glad to see you, Prentiss," he said. "Do you come from the army?"

"Yes."

"What is the word?"

"So far success is with us."

"Good!"

"We have driven McClellan to Malvern Hill. A great battle is on there to-day. If Lee succeeds in defeating him there, the Army of the Potomac is doomed."

Stuart gave an exclamation of joy.

"The cause of the Confederacy is already won!" he declared. "You may depend upon it, boy."

"I am not so sure," said Will, "and that is the subject of my errand to you."

"What? Kindly explain your meaning?"

"I will do so. General Lee requested me to state to you just how matters are. We know that General McClellan is on the retreat."

"Yes!"

"But we know that he has established so powerful a rearguard that we have not been able to crush him yet."

"That is true enough."

"Now, General Lee has absolute information that the newly formed Army of Virginia, under General Pope, is preparing to march, in fact, is already on the march from Fredericksburg south to Richmond. It is Pope's plan to slip in behind Lee and capture the capital, while he is engaged with McClellan's army."

Stuart's face grew grim and anxious. He played with the handle of his sword.

"I have long had a suspicion that such a thing would happen," he said. "It has come to pass."

CHAPTER IV.

THE RAILROAD HOLD-UP.

"No, not yet," said Will.

"I mean my presentiment has come to pass. Richmond is threatened with an attack from the north."

"It would mean the absolute destruction of our army if Pope should get in behind us."

"General Lee told you this?"

"He directed me to bring the story to you."

"Well and good! What of it?"

"You are ordered to ride north and harass the advance of Pope. Do not attempt to give battle. Simply bother him. Burn the bridges before him, obstruct the roads and keep him in check as long as you can. By that time, unless he drives you right back, you will be able to join forces with Lee, who, after he has crushed McClellan, will march against Pope."

Stuart drew himself up.

"If those are General Lee's orders, they shall be obeyed," he said; "I will keep Pope's advance busy."

"That is all that will be necessary."

"Very good! It shall be done. Go back with the word to General Lee!"

"No! I am ordered to remain with you in the march against Pope."

General Stuart stroked his beard.

"Your men are infantrymen?"

"They are, strictly speaking," replied Will. "But I hope I do not exaggerate when I say that they are first-class cavalrymen and have their horses with them."

"That is a great point," said Stuart. "You will excuse me for doubting you. I shall attend to these matters at once. If fortune sides with us, we shall have good reason to rejoice for having received this commission from General Lee. I can concentrate my men in less than twenty-four hours. I can bother Pope in many ways. In fact, I can almost hold him at bay."

Stuart spoke confidently. Will Prentiss could not but admire this man. He was a born leader, cool and calm, brave and resourceful.

"General Stuart," he said, "the Grays will be proud to ride under your banner in this campaign."

"And I shall be proud to have them," replied the Confederate general, "though, until well assured of Pope's advance, I shall not attempt to concentrate my men. I have a little side issue for the present. Shall I tell you what it is?"

"I shall be pleased to hear it," replied Will.

"Very good! From a very reliable source I have learned that a valuable supply train will attempt to come down to Savage's Station, on the York River Railroad. It is believed in Washington, or was believed when this train was loaded, that McClellan's rearguard was at Savage's, and in desperate need of ammunition and weapons. Hence the sending of this supply train from Alexandria."

"But part of the rails are pulled up on that line."

"That does not matter. The train will go on until that section is reached. A construction gang aboard can quickly relay the rails."

"Then your purpose is to hold up this train?"

"Yes."

Stuart stroked his chin-whiskers. He was reflective for a moment.

"I know that there is a valuable cargo aboard that train. It will be of great advantage to us to capture it."

"In that case," said Will, "why not put on a bold front and stop the train and confiscate the stores?"

"It shall be done," cried Stuart. "I think a hundred men are enough. Oh, by the way, your company—what of them?"

"If you do not object I will take them with me."

"By all means," agreed Stuart. "I think we can give them enough work to do."

"There is another reason," said Will. "I am after the outlaw, Wallace Main, and I believe he went in that direction."

"Main!" exclaimed General Stuart, "the biggest scoundrel unhung. I certainly hope you will catch him and hang him. If you don't, I will!"

With this Will told the cavalry leader the story of Clyde Osborn and Alicia Montrose. General Stuart listened with interest. His eyes flashed.

"Run the cur to earth," he cried. "Save the young girl if you can. Go now, Prentiss. If you need help or get into deep water I will be on hand."

"I knew that you would be sympathetic," said Will. "It is a case which demands it."

"I am wholly at the service of Miss Montrose, and she shall be rescued if it is within human power," declared Stuart, forcibly.

Will was much pleased with the prospect. It did not take General Stuart long to make up his detachment for the raid on the railroad train.

He gave rapid orders, which so disposed of his troops, that all would be occupied until his return. The sun was yet an hour high.

In a little while all were in the saddle. The Grays fell in behind Stuart's company, with Fred Randolph at their head. Will Prentiss rode in advance with Stuart.

A swift gallop brought them in sight of the railroad. Its long line of steel rails glittered in the sun.

Distant a half mile was the railroad station. A guard of Union troops could be seen stationed there.

Beyond the station was a white-topped wagon train. It was plain that they hoped to secure the supplies and convey them to some safe point for distribution among the scattered detachments of their wing of the Union army.

That the supplies could be made of use to the main army now at Malvern was hardly likely. In any event, it was certain that such a thing as an attack was not anticipated by the Union guard, for they doubtless believed that every Confederate was with Lee's advance at that moment.

Certainly they did not dream of the proximity of Stuart the raider. The great cavalry leader did not ride boldly down to the station.

He drew rein in the shadow of a little clump of oaks.

Here he held his men in readiness. With stern voice he bade them to keep silent and out of sight.

"If we ride down there now," he said to Will, "it is more than likely that we would lose the game. The telegrapher would send word to the next station to hold up the train."

When the whistle is heard we will make the dash, not before."

"I believe you are right, General Stuart," said Will. "It is evident that we are not expected."

"Yes, quite evident."

The Union guards were seen to be carelessly loitering about the place. They did not even have a picket guard out.

For some time the little party of raiders waited in the oaks. Then suddenly every man straightened in his saddle.

A distant shrill tooting was heard. Then the glitter of the brasswork on the locomotive flashed into view. The great clouds of pitchy smoke from her smokestack showed that she was using wood for fuel.

Stuart rose in his saddle, and gave the order:

"Forward! Quick trot! Gallop!"

Away dashed the troop. They swept down across the intervening distance like a gray cloud.

As they approached the station the Union train guard were seen rushing to arms. They opened fire upon the cavalry.

But a flying volley from the carbines of the cavalry dispersed them. A moment more and Stuart's men were upon the platform and swarming along the track.

Quick, sharp orders the cavalry general gave. Will Prentiss, for his part, made rapid action.

The boy captain, seeing the possibility of the engineer putting on steam and rushing by, ordered heavy rails to be thrown across the track. The next moment up to the little station thundered the train.

Then a scene of wild excitement followed. The cavalrymen swarmed aboard the cars and began to unload them, pulling out stands of muskets and barrels of supplies of all kinds. It was an important capture.

The Union guards, in retreating, had fired the station, and flames bursting from this now added to the wildness of the scene.

The engineer, however, came near spoiling matters by suddenly reversing his engine. But General Stuart, with pistol in hand, dashed up to the cab.

"Hold your engine, or I'll bore a hole in your carcass!" he shouted.

The engineer instantly stopped the engine.

The train and its valuable supplies was captured. The engineer was covered by a pistol in General Stuart's hand, so that he dared to make no further attempt at escape.

Will Prentiss felt that the Grays had won a great triumph. For their part in the affair had been even more important than that of Stuart's men.

The train was looted, all that could be of use to Stuart's army was taken. The rest was consigned to the flames which had already half consumed the station.

Part of Stuart's force had crossed the track and attacked the wagon train. The Union guard was too weak to make much resistance.

The wagons were empty, but now they became of use to the party of Confederates. General Stuart ordered them

brought across the track and loaded with the captured supplies.

"This all comes in good time," he said to Will, with a laugh. "We were getting very short of supplies."

"It certainly was an easy way to procure them," agreed Will. "I am afraid McClellan will miss them."

"All is fair in war, my boy. And now that you have assisted us so valiantly, what can I do for you?"

Will glanced at Clyde Osborn, who had now quite recovered his strength, though his bandaged wounds gave him a bad appearance.

The latter spurred his horse nearer, and said, eagerly:

"I hope that your ideas of chivalry will be strong enough to prompt you to aid us in overtaking Main."

"All that is in my power I will do," said the great cavalry leader. "You may be sure of that, sir."

"I thank you."

"I think we can best overtake Main by scouring the country to the north of us. That will be all in the line of opposing the advance of Pope as well."

"That will please me very much," said Osborn. "Alone I am powerless. With your aid I think the villain can be brought to justice."

"And he shall be!" declared Will Prentiss, positively. "General Stuart, I am under your orders."

Stuart contracted his brows a moment in thought. Then he said:

"Prentiss, I want you to take your men and ride ahead toward Cold Harbor. I will send this captured supply train to Richmond in charge of a detachment. Within six hours my entire command of ten thousand will be on its way to the Pamunkey River. We will go as far north as it is safe to venture, even to Fredericksburg, if it is possible. At any rate, we will oppose Pope's advance."

CHAPTER V.

AN ANTICIPATED ATTACK.

It was a few moments later that the Grays rode away from the railroad, bearing to the north.

Will Prentiss felt that a part of the great trust placed in him and his Grays, by General Lee, had been executed in finding Stuart. The rest would consist in aiding all in his power to block the advance of Pope.

If they could reach the Pamunkey or even advance beyond it, and destroy bridges and devastate the country in the advance of Pope's columns, the main object would be gained.

This was to delay the Union army until Lee could dispose of McClellan.

So, as the Grays galloped on, Will Prentiss felt the weight of a great responsibility on his shoulders.

At the same time he hoped to be able to do Osborn the service of overtaking Main and effecting the rescue of Alicia Montrose.

On rode the Grays, and soon left the scene of the great railroad hold-up far behind. Will knew that night was at hand, and some spot must soon be selected for a bivouac.

Men and horses were tired, and rest would be absolutely necessary.

He knew also that it was necessary to be constantly on the alert. At any moment they might run across a superior force of the foe.

For heavy detachments of Union cavalry were also raiding the country about. The young captain of the Grays therefore took all precautions.

He kept videttes ahead, and even scouts in his rear and on either flank. Thus they traveled on until dark.

It was just after dark that they came down through a little cut in the hills, and saw the abandoned buildings of a large plantation.

Only a week previous the Union cavalry had descended upon the place and raided it.

They had carried off all the live stock and everything about the place that was eatable. They had left only the buildings.

The owner and his slaves had, of course, been obliged to decamp for Richmond. It was only one of many places of the sort in Virginia.

Here Will decided to make bivouac. There was some hay in stock near the deserted barns, and this would make feed for their horses.

Therefore a halt was called. The boys flung themselves from their horses, and at once pulled off saddles and bridles. The tired steeds were corralled and fed.

Then quickly camp-fires were made.

As the evening was sultry this was not for the purpose of heat, but to cook their coffee and meats. For fresh pork and chickens had been procured when the train was held up.

The boys were all in good spirits, and their songs rose merrily upon the evening air. The scene was an enlivening one.

There was only one who felt depression. This was Osborn.

He walked moodily up and down. His head was confused, and aching from his wound. He was deeply worried and dejected.

Will had been extremely busy, and now, as he crossed the farm-yard, he caught sight of the figure of Osborn walking nervously up and down in the starlight.

"Hello, Osborn!" he cried, "what is the matter? You look forlorn."

"I have that upon my mind to make me forlorn," said Osborn.

"Cheer up! It may not be so bad as you think."

But Osborn shook his head.

"I tell you, Prentiss, I fear the worst for Alicia. She is in the hands of the worst villain in Virginia."

"I have good news for you."

Osborn turned as if upon a pivot. His manner was eager.

"What? You are not joking! Do not trifle with me, Prentiss."

"I am not trifling. I mean what I say. I have good news for you."

"God bless you! What is it?"

"I have heard from Main!"

In an instant Osborn had sprung forward. He faced Will almost fiercely.

"What about him? Where is he?"

"In the hands of the Yankees."

Osborn gasped, and for a moment he seemed to weaken, and reeling back leaned against a tree.

"In the hands of the Yankees?"

He repeated this mechanically, in a half joyous, half doubtful way.

"It may be good news and it may not. What of Alicia?"

"That I do not know," said Will; "but Clements, one of General Lee's scouts, came in an hour ago, and reported among other things that Wallace Main, and part of his command, had fallen into the hands of Colonel Clifford's United States cavalry. They had a hot fight out near the Grapevine-Bridge, on the Chickahominy. But Main was overpowered and forced to surrender."

"It is probable then that Alicia is in the hands of the Union soldiers," said Osborn, eagerly. "Well, that is better luck than I had dared hope. If this man Clifford is a man of honor he will not hold her a prisoner."

"I will endeavor to communicate with him," said Will. "If I am rightly informed he is marching our way at the present time."

"You have been very kind, Captain Prentiss. I hope it will entail no risk to you or your command."

Will's face grew serious.

"There is the question," he said. "Clements tells me that he is coming to attack us. In that case he will hardly entertain a communication of the sort from me."

"Nor shall you make it," cried Osborn. "I am at present a non-combatant. I will go to him myself and intercede for Alicia."

"Perhaps you would have better success," said Will. "It is more than likely that the Grays will become embroiled with Clifford's men if he comes this way."

"Will you dare stand your ground? Will he not be in heavier force?"

"There is no doubt of it. I shall send a courier to-night to Stuart, asking for reinforcements."

"Ah! that might do. Perhaps it would be better, and safer for me to wait until after your encounter with Clifford. But it would seem as if you could present the matter to him under a flag of truce. If he is a true man, he will set Alicia free."

"That is a matter for you to decide," said Will. "I shall be guided by your wishes."

"You are kind indeed. I will give the matter more thought. Is this scout at present in camp?"

"Yes; there is Clements over yonder by the fire. I will call him over."

Will raised his voice and called to the scout, who at once came up. He was a broad-shouldered, powerful man, with heavy features and sharp eyes.

He saluted respectfully, and Will at once addressed him:

"Clements, this is Lieutenant Osborn, of the North Carolina Volunteers. He is at present on a furlough. He is much interested in your story of Clifford's capture of Main."

The scout shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes," he said. "Well, I don't think we have much to regret in the loss of that fellow Main. He is as deep-dyed a traitor as the Confederacy ever knew."

"I would like to ask you, Clements," said Osborn, slowly, "if you can tell me about a certain young woman who was a prisoner in Main's hands. Was she also captured by Clifford?"

The scout looked blank.

"I heard of nothing of the sort," he said. "It may be so. I cannot tell."

"Where is Clifford at the present moment?"

"About four miles from here, marching up from the Chickahominy."

"Ah!" exclaimed Osborn, "your theory may be right, Prentiss. He may be coming to attack you."

"I told you I thought such was his purpose," said Will.

"Oh, it certainly is," declared the scout. "He got word of you from one of his scouts. He is marching to head you off."

This was interesting news to Will. To know that a foe, superior in numbers, was rapidly on the way to attack his company, could not but cause the boy captain some apprehension.

But he only shrugged his shoulders, and said:

"Let him come. We shall be ready for him!"

"On this spot?" asked the scout.

"No," said Will. "As soon as the boys have finished their evening meal we will move on to that hill over yonder. I believe that we can make a stand there."

"No doubt you can give him a good fight," said Clements. "But I advise you to send for reinforcements as soon as you can."

"I shall send at once," declared Will, as he strode away.

So it happened that in a few minutes a courier was riding out of the encampment with a letter for Stuart.

Will felt that he could do nothing more. To retreat was not to his taste. He was decided to make a bold stand.

Then preparations were quickly made for a defence.

Will now changed his mind in regard to retiring to the hill nearby. The farmhouse itself was on a sort of knoll. The lower story was of stone, and niches could be made in the wall for loopholes.

At once he set the boys at work digging a trench about the house. The soil was soft, and they had soon thrown up the dirt sufficiently to form an adequate defence.

Before midnight all was ready.

A line of picket guards had been established at a good distance from the house.

Will had anticipated a night attack. But it did not come.

Such of the Grays as were not on guard rolled them-

selves up in their blankets and slept. But there was no sleep for the boy captain.

He paced the wide verandah of the plantation house, and waited for the signal which should give warning of the coming of the foe.

When midnight came, however, and no sign of the foe became evident, the scout, Clements, yawned, and said:

"Captain Prentiss, I think I will take a horse and ride out a mile or more on a reconnoitering trip."

Will gave a start. A sudden idea occurred to him.

"Clements," he said, "I will go with you. I am anxious indeed to know if it is really true that Clifford and his cavalry are coming this way."

"I shall be very glad of your company, captain," replied the scout.

At this Osborn started up eagerly.

"I am anxious to know that fact also," he cried. "Will you allow me to accompany you also?"

Clements looked at Will. The young captain hesitated but a moment, then he said:

"Certainly you may go, Osborn. I see no reason why you may not. But we may have serious trouble before we return. Do you feel strong enough for hard riding?"

"I can stand anything better than this suspense!" declared the young Carolinian.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE UNION CAMP.

So Will sent orders for the horses to be brought around. They equipped themselves with pistols, and then mounted.

They rode away from Farley's Plantation, for this was the name of the place, half an hour after midnight.

Clements, the scout, rode in advance. Before they had been long on the road he pulled up his horse.

Far in the distance there was a glow against the night sky. It meant that the camp-fires of some sort of a force of men were there burning.

"It is the encampment of Clifford," said the scout. "He don't mean to attack to-night."

This was a relief to Will Prentiss.

"I am glad to know that," he said. "It means much for us. Before he can come up to-morrow we will have reinforcements."

"How do you know that he won't attack?" asked Osborn, curiously. "How does the camp-fire indicate that?"

Clements shrugged his shoulders.

"He would have no need for camp-fires," he said.

"But he may have left them burning."

"The possibility is quite remote. It is more likely that he has decided to wait until to-morrow."

They now rode on again. For some time there was silence. Then the scout again pulled up his horse.

"Are you satisfied, Captain Prentiss? Shall we go back?"

Will hesitated. An idea had suddenly come to him.

"No; I am not just satisfied," he said. "I wonder if we could gain a point from which we could see their encampment?"

Clements was silent a moment, then he said:

"I can do more than that for you. I can take you into their encampment, if you wish!"

Osborn was eager and excited, but he said nothing. Will Prentiss was reflective a moment.

"Do you mean that, Clements?" he asked, finally.

"I do."

"You will take us right into the camp of the enemy?"

"Yes."

"How can you do that?"

"I have their countersign. It will be easy to pass their guard. But you would have to discard your uniform. Lieutenant Osborn is all right, for he wears the dress of a civilian."

"That, then, is the stumbling block."

"It is a slight one. In my saddle-bags I have a suit of brown jeans, which I sometimes use as a disguise. I can let you have it, and you can pull it on over your uniform. It is a wise thing that you left your sword behind."

The idea was a daring one.

But it caught Will on the instant, and acting on impulse, he cried:

"It shall be done."

"Do you mean it?"

"I do."

Osborn was too delighted for expression. The prospect of entering the camp of the Union cavalry, and perhaps of seeing the girl he loved, was a joyous one. He was ready to risk anything.

They dismounted, and it did not take Will long to don his disguise. He was completely changed in appearance.

Now the scout adopted another precaution. He tore some strips from his blanket, and proceeded to bind the hoofs of his horse.

Will observed the move in surprise.

"Why do you do that?" he asked.

"I think we had better muffle our horses' hoofs," said the scout. "It is a good precaution, for the picket might hear us and be suspicious. We must leave our horses behind when we enter camp."

Will and Osborn proceeded to imitate the scout's example.

They also muffled their horses' hoofs. Then once again they mounted.

They went on now silently. A couple of miles were covered, and now the lights of the Union camp-fires were close at hand.

"Here we are," whispered Clements. "We will leave our horses in this thicket."

They dismounted and led their horses into the undergrowth. Here they were tethered and left.

Then they went forward on foot. Clements led the way through a narrow ravine in the dark.

Suddenly a sharp voice called:

"Halt!"

"Aye, aye!" said Clements in reply.

"Who goes there?"

"A friend."

"Advance, friend, and give the countersign!"

Clements stepped forward and lowered his voice:

"Our country shall be free!"

"Pass in friends!" said the picket, lowering his musket.

The three men did so. They were soon beyond the guard line and advancing through the gloom toward the camp-fires.

In the darkness they met Union cavalymen, singly and in numbers. All passed them by without question.

The three daring adventurers kept on until they had reached the main line of encampment. The scene was a familiar one to them.

Upon the ground were hundreds of the soldiers rolled in their blankets, asleep. About some of the camp-fires others were gathered, engaged in roasting corn.

The officers' tents were seen not far away, and the horses were corralled just beyond. It was a scene not out of place now anywhere in Virginia. The country was overrun with just such marauding parties as this.

Our three adventurers gazed upon the scene, however, with interest. Will was sizing up the strength of the foe.

The scout was doing the same, and keeping a cautious eye upon everything. But Osborn was thinking of one fair prisoner, a sight of whom would have made his heart leap.

Just then from one of the tents an officer stepped forth. He was tall, and if it had not been for a supercilious air and a cruel leer about his mouth, might have been deemed prepossessing.

Clements gave a start, and clutched Will's arm.

"Do you see him?"

"Yes."

"That is Colonel Clifford."

Will gazed with interest at the Union officer. He was at once most unfavorably impressed with him.

Accompanying Clifford was a young lieutenant, whose appearance was better. As they passed the three adventurers Clifford's words reached their ears.

"I tell you she is pretty, Foster," he said, in a mocking tone. "In these times one can't afford to let such a prize slip through his grasp. I understand she is the daughter of a rich planter and an heiress. Heigho! If she likes me I am not to blame! Eh?"

"Don't deceive yourself, colonel," said the lieutenant, whose name was Foster. "Your years of success with the fair sex has turned your brain, I fear. These Virginia girls are spitfires. They hate the Yankees."

"Oh, they do, eh?"

"Yes. You will get the mitten!"

"Will I? We'll see about that. Surely I am as good a candidate as Main."

"Bah! he forcibly abducted her. She would never marry him of her own free will."

Clifford whistled and snapped his fingers.

"I'll wager you a hundred I make the conquest," he said.

"If she gives me cold treatment I know a way to make her look more kindly upon me."

"You must be a wizard with the women, colonel," laughed Foster. "However, I wish you luck."

"Oh, thanks, Foster. I will see you later—or earlier."

"The latter, I guess, as the night is well nigh spent. I am going to get some sleep."

They parted. For a moment our three friends stood and watched Clifford's figure recede in the gloom.

Osborn leaned forward with white face and clenched hands.

"He is talking of her," he said. "I shall leave you here."

"Wait, Osborn," said Will, firmly. "Where are you going?"

"I am going where he goes."

"Don't be a fool!"

"Do you think I can listen to that sort of thing and remain inactive?"

"You are not to go alone. You will do something rash. Clements, what do you advise?"

The scout was silent a moment. Then he said:

"It's likely that he means to force his attention upon some young woman who is at present in this camp. It is also likely that the young woman is no other than Miss Montrose."

"Yes."

"Well, now, take my advice."

"What is it?"

"Both of you go back to where we left the horses. Leave the rest to me."

"No," said Osborn, firmly, "I can't do that, Clements. I beg you not to restrain me. I must go!"

"Then we go with you," said Will. "Remember, Osborn, if you make a foolish move all is lost. It is much better to proceed with care."

Osborn, however, did not seem to heed the words. He crept forward after the Union colonel.

Clifford turned sharply away from the camp-fires. He passed around a little knoll, and now in the gloom our adventurers beheld that which gave them surprise.

It was a small cabin, evidently once the abode of negroes. Before the door paced an armed guard.

Clifford walked boldly up to the door. He turned and spoke to the guard, who shouldered his musket and walked away toward the camp-fires.

Clifford now pressed upon the cabin door and it opened. He entered, a flood of light showing his figure as he passed in and closed the door behind him.

As the guard had been sent away there seemed to Will and his companions no reason why they should not see what was going on in the cabin.

A shuttered window was at one end of the building. But there were wide cracks in the shutter.

Reaching this they were able to peer in and behold that which gave them all a deep thrill.

The cabin had but one long room. At one side was a rude hearth. A dim oil-lamp was hung from the wall.

Sitting by the hearth was an old negress, who was rocking to and fro and crooning dismally. Near a table in the

center of the room sat a young girl, pale and abstracted, until the door had opened.

She was now upon her feet.

Osborn gasped as he caught sight of her. He trembled violently.

CHAPTER VII.

UNSUCCESSFUL LOVE-MAKING.

It was a thrilling picture. The fair young Southern girl had arisen and stood, flushed and haughty. The Union colonel, in his handsome uniform, stood by the door.

He had removed his hat, and now bowed low.

"Pardon this intrusion," he said, in a modulated voice, "but since you came here I have been thinking deeply about you."

"I trust, sir, that you will grant my prayer, and give me safe escort to our own lines," she said. "My detention here can in no wise benefit you, and my safe return will relieve the anxiety of my friends."

"The anxiety of your friends shall be relieved."

"Oh! then you will not hold me a prisoner?" she cried, eagerly.

"Not in that sense," he replied.

Her face fell.

"Your words are obscure!"

"My meaning shall be made plain to you," he said, taking a step nearer. "Tell me, why were you in the company of Main, whom everybody knows should hang?"

"I was in his power against my will," replied Alicia. "You need hardly ask me that, when you found me securely bound to my horse."

"Just so," said the colonel, in a low tone. "I know that he was abducting you with the idea that he could force you to consent to marry him."

"I would sooner have died!"

"Of course you would! Now, my dear Miss Montrose, I have become deeply interested in you. I want to offer you my friendship."

"I thank you. But I shall scarcely trespass upon it further than to ask you to send me back to my friends."

"Do you really wish to go?"

"I would not ask otherwise."

He sank into a chair and bent a burning gaze upon her.

"You are a little Southern girl," he said. "You have all the beauty, the pride and the fire of your race. Oh, you are glorious! You are my ideal! From the moment my eyes rested upon you I have been enchained."

It required the efforts of both Will and Clements now to restrain Osborn.

The scene was now dramatic.

Alicia drew back slowly, until her back was against the cabin wall. There was a light of terror in her eyes.

"I—I don't understand you," she said, huskily. "I don't like your words."

"No?" said Clifford, softly. "I understand. You have had no admirers; the world is new to you. You are timid as a dove. You do not like me because I am a Union officer. In what manner can I atone for this and win your best esteem?"

Alicia placed one hand at her throat. She felt faint and sick.

She had stood in terror of Main. But now she seemed to have escaped one peril only to encounter another.

"I ask you, sir, in the name of heaven to send me back to my friends," she said, tensely.

"Then you are afraid of me?"

She did not reply. Her gaze, filled with a terror peculiar to the hunted, was upon him.

Clifford had his mocking gaze fixed upon her. There was a grim smile flickering about his cruel mouth.

He arose and moved toward her. Like a flash she attempted to dart by him and gain the door.

But he caught her wrist, and with a quick movement flung her slight figure before him. The brutal act wrung a wild cry of pain from her lips.

This capped the climax. Neither Will nor Clements could restrain Osborn longer.

He slipped from their grasp like an eel; around the corner of the cabin he dashed.

Through the door and upon Clifford like a tiger he sprang, hurling him across the room.

Then a wild, glad cry pealed from the lips of the girl prisoner, and she sprang into the arms of her young champion.

Will and Clements for a moment were stupefied, and hardly knew what to do.

"The fool!" gasped the boy captain, "he has spoiled his chances. The game is up now!"

Clements grasped him by the arm.

"No," he said; "we can't help him by going in there. We will only get into a trap and ruin everything. Wait here!"

Clifford, astounded and enraged beyond expression, had sprung to his feet, and stood glaring at the young champion. He drew a hand across his eyes, as if to make sure that he was not dreaming.

He saw the young Carolinian, with his bandaged head, standing in the center of the cabin floor with the young Southern girl clasped in his arms.

The negress had arisen and stood looking from Clifford to the others, apparently in wonderment.

The Union colonel did not, for some moments, speak or make a move. He seemed too absolutely stupefied.

But, finally, he took a step forward as a realization of the situation came upon him; the expression of his face became fiendish.

Hatred, malevolence, fury all blended in that mad glance with which he regarded Osborn. His sword leaped from its sheath, and he walked slowly forward.

"Who are you?" he gritted. "Where did you come from?"

"I am a man, and you are not," said Osborn, facing him

fearlessly. "I would be less if I failed to champion a defenceless female."

"You are a fool and a meddler!" gritted Clifford. "Unhand that young woman!"

"I will unhand her only to chastise you!"

"You insolent cur!"

Osborn detached Alicia's hold, and faced the Union colonel.

"I expect to meet you upon even terms," he said. "I have no sword——"

"That is my advantage!" hissed Clifford, lunging forward. It looked for an instant as if the brave Osborn would be run through.

But a movement aside quick as lightning allowed the blade, fortunately, to pass under his armpit. A pressure of the arm upon the blade and a powerful wrench twisted the weapon from Clifford's hold.

Quick as a flash Osborn caught the blade and grasped the hilt, facing the colonel with his own weapon.

"A cowardly game!" he said, coldly. "If I were to serve the ends of justice I would run you through with your own sword."

Clifford, white, and for an instant terrified, dodged back. He instantly felt for his pistol.

But he had none with him. He stood quivering and furious with baffled rage in the far end of the cabin.

"Give me that sword!" he gritted. "I'll have you shot for this."

"No, you won't," cried Osborn, as he took a step toward him; "I can see what a villain you are. Don't dare to give the alarm. I will kill you where you stand if you do!"

Trembling with impotent rage and fear Clifford stood facing the young Southerner.

"What do you want?" he gritted.

"Safe conduct beyond your lines for myself and this young woman."

"What is she to you?"

"She is my betrothed wife!"

Clifford's eyes glittered with a greenish light of jealousy.

"Oh, she is eh? I see why she would not favor me. Well, I am sorry, my young sir, but you will get a Tartar."

"However that may be, it should not concern you."

"It concerns me so deeply that I feel quite disgruntled to think that the Tartar should give me such a cold shoulder. I am not used to such treatment at the hands of the fair sex."

"Your conceit is insufferable."

"Your assurance is more so. Do you realize your position? You are within the lines of my regiment. Here my word is law. I can have you shot as a spy. Then, you will see how quickly your faithful sweetheart will forget you and turn to me. I know the feminine nature too well."

"I cannot recognize your advantage," said Osborn, elevating the point of the sword. "Your life is at my mercy, and you shall die if you do not swear to give us safe conduct beyond your lines."

A cunning light came into Clifford's eyes.

"Those are your terms?" he asked.

"They are!"

"I am sure they are generous."

"Exceedingly so, for the world would be much happier if I were to relieve it of your worthless presence."

"Well, perhaps I had better yield. Certainly I would be a fool to waste my affections on the Tartar. Life is dearer than love, for it is not so easily found. I accept your terms. Give me my sword."

Osborn, however, turned and laid it on the table. He folded his arms.

"Not yet!" he said. "You shall first prove your sincerity."

"You doubt me?"

"I am justified."

"Bah! I will show you what my word is worth. I sent my sentry here for a guard of five men. He cannot fail to be here in a few moments. I will then attend to your request."

The words had barely left Clifford's lips when the tramp of feet sounded without. Five cavalymen walked into the cabin.

Will and Clements had listened to and witnessed the scene enacted in the cabin.

They admired the plucky work and attitude of Osborn. Will had held a pistol in readiness to shoot if Clifford by any chance got the upper hand of Osborn. When the cavalymen arrived they were compelled to slink away into the shadows.

Both realized how futile it was just now to make an effort to aid Osborn.

If they revealed themselves all chance would be lost. Osborn had a chance to prove himself a civilian. The threats of Clifford to kill him were empty, for he had no charge against him.

Everything seemed to be in Osborn's favor. Clifford risked his standing as a Union officer to let it become known that he intended to abduct and hold against her will, the young Southern girl.

But, when the cavalymen burst into the cabin Clifford played a desperate and daring card, which showed his vile and treacherous nature.

"Boys," he said, "this man and girl are both spies. I want you to hold them both under guard until you have further orders."

Osborn was thunderstruck. Contempt and anger showed in his face.

"You break your word!" he cried. "You coward and liar!"

Two of the cavalymen had grasped the young Southerner by the arms. Clifford stepped forward with evil exultation in his voice and manner.

"You are badly fooled," he said. "It is a clever stratagem; nothing more. This is for the blow you gave me!"

With the flat of his hand Clifford struck the prisoner across the face. The blow showed the cowardly base nature of the villain.

For one instant Osborn quivered. Then like a lion he

flung off the hold of the cavalymen and launched himself forward.

His fingers closed upon Clifford's windpipe and he flung him like a wet rag to the far corner of the room. Grasping the sword from the table, he gave a fierce cry of defiance and flung himself full at the five cavalymen.

So swift and unexpected was his attack that the first of the cavalymen went down with a terrific gash across his head. The second had just time to whisk out his sword when Osborn's blade shattered his wrist. Only three men were left between him and the door.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DARING ESCAPE.

It was a most brilliant and daring attempt to gain his freedom that was made by Osborn. He had disposed of three of his foes.

Three were left.

These three, however, had drawn their swords. The young Carolinian, who seemed to be a clever swordsman, might have crossed blades with any one of the party.

But three against one with swords was a handicap hardly to be overcome.

Not for an instant though did he waver or hesitate. His blade clashed with that of the first of his foes.

Then a surprising thing happened.

Alicia, who up to the moment had been a thrilled and excited witness, now dashed forward and grasped the wrist of one of the swordsmen. The fellow hurled her from him with a fierce imprecation.

But it disposed of his blade for the moment so that Osborn, left with one in front of him, the third man being behind, quickly turned his foe's guard and brought him down with a thrust in the shoulder.

Will and the scout, Clements, could now stand it no longer. They rushed around the cabin with all haste.

When they sprang into the cabin Osborn was hard pressed with the remaining two of the cavalymen. Clements dealt the first a terrific blow from behind with the butt of his pistol.

The fellow sank into a heap.

Will threw himself upon the other and dealt him a blow which deprived him of his senses. Then for an instant Osborn, with quivering sword, faced them.

"God be thanked! You came in the nick of time!" he cried. "I thought it was all up with me."

"It will be with all of us if we tarry here another minute!" cried Clements. "We must get back to our horses the quickest way. Oh, stop her!"

The negress had made a dash for the door. Will caught her and drew her back.

"Don't be afraid, mammy. We won't hurt you," he said. "But you mustn't betray us."

"Fo' de Lor's sake, massa! Ise only a po' ole brack woman. I neber do nobody no harm. Jes' lemme go!"

"Not yet!" said Osborn. "Alicia, do you know this negress?"

"She was kind to me," said Alicia. "I would not do her harm."

The negress crept to Alicia's side and seized the hem of her dress.

"Oh, bress yo', young missy!" she cried. "Ise done gwine to stay by yo'. I jes' die fo' yo'. I don' like de Yankees no mo'. Ise goin' back to de ole plantation an' I ain' gwine to leabe it no mo'."

"All right, mammy," said Alicia gently. "I am not sure that any of us will ever get out of here."

A more desperate situation could hardly be conceived. They were in the midst of the Union camp. The colonel and three of the cavalymen were unconscious. The other two were numb and agonized with pain.

At any moment the situation might be discovered and the alarm given.

A thousand men would come swarming down upon them. It was necessary to act at once if escape was to be accomplished.

Will knew this full well. The astute scout, Clements, had closed the cabin door. His face was white and set.

"There's only one chance for us," he said.

"Ah!" exclaimed Will. "What is that?"

"It is a scant one! We must bind and gag Clifford and these fellows. If we can do it and get beyond the lines before they are discovered——"

"Can we do it?"

"It is our only hope!"

No time was lost. The three men set to work with utmost despatch. Plenty of rope was found in the cabin.

Clifford came to while he was being gagged. He struggled in vain.

The others were all bound and gagged. Then Clements scattered the fire and darkened it with ashes. He then blew out the oil lamp.

They crept out of the cabin and Clements fastened the door. For a moment they stood in the outer air.

Osborn still had Clifford's sword in his right hand and was supporting Alicia with his left arm.

"Throw that away!" said Clements, indicating the sword.

"You think I won't need it?"

"It will betray you!"

Osborn tossed it into a heap of bushes. Clements now took a look about him.

It was certainly a strange as well as thrilling position. They were in the heart of the Union camp.

About them were a thousand foes. A scene had been enacted in their midst which seemed incredible.

But Clements now whispered:

"There is only one thing to do. We three men came in over yonder. We had to cross the camp-fire line to do it. We were not questioned coming over. We ought not to be going back."

"But—the women——" began Will.

"That is it! If they are seen with us we may attract attention."

"But there is no other way," began Osborn.

"Oh, yes there is!"

"What is it?"

"Well, I'll tell you. We'll let mammy and Miss Montrose come on some distance behind. We will cross the camp line first. On the other side, in the shadows, we will wait. They may then cross."

"But some officer will be sure to see Miss Alicia and stop them."

"Not while she is with mammy. I think there is little risk. At any rate it is our only hope. If we fail, we must leave the women here and return with a force large enough to force Clifford to surrender."

Clements' plan certainly was the only logical one. All were bound to admit this.

So it was adopted.

It was a critical moment when the three daring adventurers crossed the camp line and passed beyond the radius of the fire light.

The risk really was not great. Being within the lines they stood little chance of being molested. It was assumed that anyone within the lines had a right there.

But the sight of Alicia and the negress might excite the cupidity of any officer who might see them.

So their coming was awaited with anxiety. Soon they were seen crossing the fire-lit zone. Slowly they came, the negress ambling beside the beautiful young Southern girl.

They crossed, however, in safety. They entered the shadows beyond and joined Osborn and the others.

"Now," whispered Clements. "We must do the same at the picket line. I have an idea the picket may stop the women. But, leave that to me."

So the three men again went ahead and now approached the picket line. Just beyond, in the ravine, awaited their horses.

Once in the saddle they could laugh at pursuit in the darkness. The ride back to Farley's Plantation would be a decidedly swift and merry one.

Will was in advance as they approached the picket.

He paused in his walk and lowered his musket suspiciously.

"Good evening, guard," said Will. "You recall passing us in an hour ago, don't you?"

"Oh, yes!" said the sentry, raising his musket. "It's all right, gentlemen. At this late hour I have to keep an eye out for spies."

"Just so! they are plentiful nowadays."

"We shot two, yesterday."

"Ah, well, we are not spies. We are planters and simply had business with your colonel in regard to some supplies."

"I hope you sold him something better than salt horse to eat," said the sentry. "If they don't feed us better soon, I believe I'll desert."

At this all laughed. Clements lingered, chatting with the picket. He had a reason for that.

Suddenly in the gloom the figures of the negress and Alicia appeared.

"Hello!" exclaimed the scout. "Who is this coming? It looks like women."

"Women?" said the picket. "I have orders to let no woman pass out of the lines to-night."

"Oh, you have?"

"Yes! Hello! that's the girl the colonel captured this afternoon from Main. I'll have to call the guard and send her back. Halt!"

He interposed his musket across the path of Alicia and the negress. It was a thrilling moment.

"We wish to pass out," said Alicia, in her sweet voice. "I have the password. Our country is free!"

"That's the password, miss, but I can't let you pass."

"Why not?"

"It's against orders."

"But I must pass. Colonel Clifford will censure you for this."

"Can't help it! If I disobeyed his orders, he'd shoot me at sunrise. You see it's a soldier's duty, miss."

"I think it's all right, sentry," said Will. "I saw Clifford say farewell to her."

"I'll call the guard," said the picket. But Clements had stepped around in his rear.

"No you won't, my good fellow. These females must pass!"

Clements' fingers were over the picket's windpipe. He could not cry out, and could only struggle feebly.

Will gagged him quickly and then bound him with pieces of rope which he had slipped into his pocket while at the cabin. In a few moments he was helpless.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIGHT AT FARLEY'S.

It was a wise precaution which Clements had taken to dally and converse with the picket.

Otherwise he would have called the guard and the rescue of Alicia would have been frustrated.

As it was the plot had worked to perfection. Hastily, they crept down into the ravine.

Their horses were found safely tethered where they had left them.

It was but a moment's work to mount. Alicia rode behind Osborn. The negro mammy, who was used to riding, mounted behind Clements.

Thus the party rode away.

How long it was before the condition of affairs at the cabin was discovered they never knew. But no sounds of pursuit came to their ears.

An hour later the horses ambled into the lane leading to Farley's Plantation.

"Halt!" came a sharp hail. "Who goes there?"

"Friends!" cried Will.

"Advance, friends, and give the countersign!"

"Under the Southern flag!"

A sharp cry escaped the Confederate picket.

"Why, it's our captain!" he cried. "We are glad you have got back safely, Captain Prentiss. Lieutenant Randolph wants to see you badly. He has new orders for you, I think."

Will rode past the picket.

"Is that so!" he exclaimed. "Where is the lieutenant?"

"At the house, sir."

The party rode hastily up to the fortified plantation house. All dismounted. Clements, the scout, joined Will, who now gave orders that Osborn and his female companions should be given lodgings in the lower rooms of the house, where quarters had been provided for himself.

Then with Clements he hastened to find Fred.

The young lieutenant was in the outer line of trenches, directing the placing of some planks in the breastworks.

"Hello, Fred!" called the young captain. "What is the news?"

"Will Prentiss!" cried Fred, joyfully. "I am glad you are back. I have just received word from Stuart that reinforcements are on the way. He is sending us three guns and six hundred men. We must hold this position for a large body of Union troops are moving this way. He thinks it may be a part of Pope's advance guard sent out to feel the way."

Will's eyes flashed.

"Good!" he cried. "When are the reinforcements expected?"

"In the morning."

"Better yet! It is likely that we will be attacked then by Clifford. He has a thousand men, but no artillery. We shall surely hold them all right."

"Everything looks favorable. What luck did you have?"

"We rescued Miss Montrose and brought her back with us."

"Hurrah! I suppose Osborn is happy?"

"The happiest fellow on earth. Hello! What is that?"

To the startled hearing of all came a distant comprehensive sound. It was the note of a bugle.

Will looked into the east and saw that the gray dawn was just breaking.

"Sound the reveille!" he cried. "Call the boys to quarters. There'll be hot work here in ten minutes."

"Do you believe it?"

"That is the bugle of Clifford's cavalry. He is coming for vengeance. If he can wipe us out he'll do it. And he may succeed too far. He has five times our number to do it with."

"Not if our reinforcements arrive," cried Fred.

"But they may come too late. Let every man be at his post. We must do our best."

The Grays came tumbling out excitedly and rushed into the trenches. They were none too soon.

The muskets of the pickets could already be heard as the advance line of Clifford's force came up.

The pickets were driven in and now in the early morning light horsemen were seen in the fields beyond.

Fire was opened by the Grays at once. The range was yet a trifle long, but they made it somewhat effective.

It was undoubtedly a surprise to Clifford to find the Grays intrenched. He had expected to find them in bivouac.

But the Union cavalry leader lost no time. He quickly dismounted his men and deployed them in line of battle. They made an imposing array and Will felt some misgivings as to the result.

But he knew that if he could hold out until the artillery promised him by Stuart should arrive, quite a new face could be put upon matters.

Clifford's men advanced under cover of the rail fences.

They crept up in double lines as near as they could safely. They poured in a heavy fire upon the defenses of the Grays.

Then suddenly, the order was given to charge.

Will, who was in the outer trenches, heard the order plainly. How he longed for the artillery which would have put an end to the assault at once.

He felt a touch on his arm and turned. There stood Osborn with his bandaged head, pale and grim.

The young Carolinian held a musket in his hand.

"What are you doing?" exclaimed Will. "Go back! You are not strong enough to be out here! Then if you should lose your life—think of her!"

"She would not respect me, nor would I respect myself, if I remained idle at such a time as this," he said.

"But, you are rash."

"I am stronger than you think. It is my desire to fight for my country."

Will admired the pluck of the young Carolinian. He said no more, and soon Osborn was in the trenches, fighting desperately with the rest.

The wisdom of Will's move in fortifying the Farley House was now made manifest. It was almost impregnable.

The lower story of stone resisted the bullets of the foe.

The upper story of wood was shot through and through, in fact, riddled by musket balls. But the lower story protected the Grays.

Moreover, the fire they kept up was destructive. Men were seen to throw up their hands and roll over behind the rail fences.

But now came the order to charge. Will heard it plainly.

He looked sharply for Clifford as the Grays sprung up in the trenches to meet the oncoming line of blue. Over the rail fence they surged, across the farm-house yard and to the very foot of the breastworks.

It was a critical moment.

The least bit of wavering then would have been fatal. If the Grays had faltered only a trifle, had sickened the least bit at light of that overwhelming line all would have been lost.

But they did not.

They rose in the trenches and fired their carbines in a deadly close range volley that mowed the enemy's line down in wind-rows. Heaps of dead lay on the face of the breastworks.

Had the cavalymen possessed bayonets it is possible they might have crossed into the trenches.

But their sabres were no match for the carbines of the Grays. Those in the trenches fired a volley, only to be followed by those in the house.

Before such a deadly hail of lead the cavalymen of Clifford fell back. They retreated incontinently beyond the rail fence.

Cheer upon cheer went up from the Grays. To them it was indeed a victorious moment.

Clifford's men now fell back to form again. It was certain that the infuriated colonel, thirsting for vengeance, would not give up the attack so long as he had a man left.

Once again they were seen to form behind the rail fence. The bugle was just sounding a charge, when its notes were cut short by a startling sound.

It was the boom of a cannon, and a shell struck the ground in their midst, tearing a great hole and burying a couple of the cavalymen in it.

Will and his comrades felt that victory was assured. The reinforcements of Stuart had come.

On the edge of the woods, just beyond the lane, the first gun had come up and its company had braced it there and opened fire.

Another came up in a few moments. Then came the third.

Shells began to fly and tear up the ground occupied by Clifford. It was, of course, useless to try to stand before artillery.

So the Union cavalymen fell back. In a few moments they were in full retreat.

The victory was won.

The artillery and its six hundred followers now came trooping down. The Grays were greatly elated with the victory.

It is hardly necessary to say that the most delighted of all were probably Osborn and Alicia. The young girl, through the whole, had been busy administering to the needs of the wounded.

The Grays had lost nine of their boys. It was a hard loss and indicative of the desperate character of the fighting.

The Union loss had been exceedingly heavy. Clifford did not deign to send a detachment to remove the dead left behind.

They were buried by the Grays.

The captain of the artillery company, whose name was Hobbs, brought a message from Stuart. Will read it with deep interest.

"Dear Prentiss: I have felt a little bit shaky about you ever since you left me for that long march after Main. Your message, saying that Main had been captured by Clifford, is most encouraging. I hope he will hang him. I realize that you need reinforcements and I have sent them. In regard to Pope's movement I have learned that it is a great likelihood. I know that a heavy body of United States troops is now south of the Pamunkey River. They

may be an advance guard of his army. I intend to locate them if I can and give them a hard fight.

"I advise you to march east a trifle and try to effect a junction with me, at or above Bottoms Bridge. As soon as I attend to a little affair here, I am going to ride up the valley of the Pamunkey, and I want you and your troop to go with me. I shall therefore lose sight of you for a while. Hoping to see you at some distant day, I have the honor to be,

Yours, STUART."

Will read the letter with interest while it encouraged him greatly; it also taught him an important fact.

This was, that if he was attacked by this new and overwhelming force of troops from the Pamunkey, he could expect no immediate reinforcements from Stuart.

CHAPTER X.

THE APPROACHING FOE.

The Grays must for the present fight on their own hook with such material as they had at hand. This was, however, not altogether bad.

Will had three field pieces and with the six hundred men sent him, he had a reasonably effective force.

All were cavalymen, except the artillerists and his Grays. None carried the effective bayonet.

This was a matter that Will regretted. He had learned that there was nothing more effective at a critical moment to turn the tide of battle than a desperate dash with the bayonet.

Men who will face flying bullets with impunity, will turn sick with fear at sight of oncoming bayonets. The horror of the cold steel is there.

Clifford would not return to the attack as Will well knew.

His company had been well shattered by the fight at Farley's. It was likely that Clifford would be recalled now to the Union headquarters at Alexandria.

So Clyde Osborn and his fiancée, Alicia Montrose, felt the greatest of relief.

"I hope never to see him again," said Alicia, with a shiver. "He is the worst villain I ever knew in my life."

"So he is!" agreed Will. "How he broke his word in the cabin last night when you offered him his sword."

"I should have known better than to trust him."

"At that, you got the best of him."

"So I did, and I am thankful. Well, Captain Prentiss, both Miss Montrose and myself feel that we owe you a great debt. We are conscious that we can never repay it, but we assure you that we shall always hold you and your kindness in memory dear."

"There is no obligation," said Will. "Do you think of leaving us?"

"There is an opportunity to return to Richmond. I shall

accompany Alicia there. Then I shall resume my sword and rejoin my company. They are waiting for me, be sure."

Will held out his hand.

"Osborn," he said, "I respect you for a brave fellow. I wish you the greatest of joy. I hope to see you win fame in the ranks yet."

"I shall do my duty."

"That is the only motive one needs."

"I believe it. Good-bye, Prentiss!"

"Good-bye, Osborn!"

The young Carolinian went off to rejoin his prospective bride. Alicia came herself to thank Will.

"We shall never forget you, Captain Prentiss," she said. "When the war is over and we all meet again in Richmond, I hope to see you wearing a general's shoulder-straps."

"I fear you will be disappointed."

"Why?"

"Even if I had such good fortune as to win them, I doubt if I would ever wear them. I have no ambition of the sort. If I accepted promotion of that sort I would have to leave my boys."

"And that you don't want to do."

"Never! As captain of the Virginia Grays, I am well satisfied. If I cannot accomplish anything with them, then I will stop in despair."

"You have already achieved wonders. I wish you great happiness, Captain Prentiss."

Will saluted the pretty Southern maiden who now hastened away. A short while later the two lovers rode away from the intrenchments.

They rode south in the direction of Richmond. The Grays cheered them when they disappeared from view. Will saw no more of them.

But he heard in later life of their happy marriage and removal to Weldon, North Carolina. There they and their descendants live at the present day.

The little romance disposed of, Will felt that he must now devote the time to hard fighting. He was not altogether satisfied with the position of the Grays.

He longed to start on the eastward march, which should take him back to the staff of General Lee. He had no means of knowing just how the battle of Malvern Hill had terminated.

He hoped, of course, that it had resulted in a grand victory for the Confederate cause. Yet he feared from the state of affairs when he left that it had not been such.

The clever scout, Clements, had at once gone out to ascertain how matters were in the vicinity when Clifford withdrew his force.

He now returned and met Will just as the young captain was about to order his horse and take a reconnoitering tour.

"Clements!" cried the boy-captain. "I am glad to see you. What word do you bring?"

The scout shook his head grimly.

"There is certainly a heavy Union force coming this way," he said. "I saw their columns from the hill, over yonder."

"What is their force at a rough guess?"

"Oh, I cannot say, exactly. I should, at a rough estimate, set it at five thousand."

Will snapped his fingers.

"That's all right," he cried. "You'll see Stuart eat them up. He'll drive them with the greatest of ease."

"You may be right, my boy, but you must remember that cavalry don't very often drive infantry."

"Are they all infantry?"

"In solid column."

Will walked up and down reflectively.

"Of course," he said. "We can't compete with them alone. But we can, with our artillery, make a little stand until Stuart can come up."

"If he comes."

Will gave a start.

"Do you doubt that?" he asked.

Clements shrugged his shoulders. His shrewd eyes glittered as he replied:

"There is no more able general in our army than Jeb Stuart. But he is not reliable. The very nature of a cavalryman's life precludes that. The reinforcements he sent you to-day were a wonder to me."

Will felt somewhat anxious.

"Stuart warned me of the approach of this force," he said. "If he had not intended to co-operate with us it don't seem as if he would have sent me the word he did."

"Mind you, there is my point. I don't say that Stuart would fail you intentionally. But he might not be able to get here."

"That is one of the chances of war."

"Can you afford to take any chances in face of such an overpowering force?" asked the scout.

"Clements," said Will, "I have ordered my horse. Suppose we ride out and take a look at the approaching foe."

"Very well, captain."

In a few moments both were galloping away. They struck into a path, a half-mile further on, which led to the top of a high hill.

From this they had an extended view of the country. Will brought his glass to his eyes and swept the country carefully. He gave a little start.

"I see them," he said. "Quite a body of troops, eh?"

"I set them at about five thousand."

"So should I. They are marching this way also. On my word they have artillery, also."

"Yes?"

"See here, Clements," said Will, lowering his glass. "What can it mean, unless that Pope is actually on his march to Richmond? Such a body of men as that would never be south of the Pamunkey for any other purpose, would they?"

The scout shook his head.

"I don't know what to make of it. It may be that Pope has sent them ahead to open the way and capture all important outposts."

"They run the danger and risk of being cut off."

"The risk is little as you will admit. Our army is busy

with McClellan. Stuart is the only mobile force we have to oppose such a march." Pope undoubtedly knows this."

"Well," said Will with a deep breath, "Stuart has sufficient force to cut them off. If I knew where to find him I'd send him word."

"Rest easy, boy. He knows all about these five thousand Yankee soldiers and don't you forget it. He is doubtless somewhere above them or hovering on their flank, ready to strike a hard blow."

Will bowed with conviction.

"Then it is all the more necessary that we should hold our position," he said. "We are a stumbling block in their path."

But Clements shook his head.

"Bad tactics," he said.

"What!" exclaimed Will in surprise. "How do you make that out?"

"Easy enough, my boy. In the first place you are not sure enough of heavy reinforcements. In the second place your company is acting as light cavalry reinforced by a light flying battery of three guns. Cavalry never makes a stand. Only infantry does that. Cavalry should never allow itself to be surrounded. It is never necessary, for it has the means to be mobile and mobile it should be."

Will saw the point instantly. It came to him that the scout was right.

He had been fighting his cavalry with infantry tactics. He had held his own against Clifford safely, owing to the light artillery which arrived just in time.

But now, in the face of a force of infantry five thousand strong he would be sealing his fate to make a stand and allow himself to be surrounded.

"Clements," he said, "you are right. You see, I am used to fighting the Grays as infantry. I forgot that."

"Forgetfulness is a bad thing in war, my boy."

"I admit it and I assure you that I am thankful to you for the point. I will go back and mount my company at once."

"Now you are talking tactics. Mount your men and hitch light horses onto your artillery. Eight horses to a gun if six are not enough. Ride right up in the face of that mass of infantry, unlimber and open fire. As soon as they charge, limber up and run. Always keep out of range and reach. In the meantime your cavalry can be picking a row with their rear guard or their flanking columns."

"Clements!" cried Will, "I must have you for a lieutenant. Will you take the berth?"

"Pshaw!" said the scout. "I am not qualified for such a position."

"What? And here you have been giving me tactics worthy of Napoleon?"

"That is all right, my boy, but you are a better officer than I am. I am all right so far as things go that are right under my nose and that I can see. But when it comes to some military complication or complexity of the situation, I would get into too deep water. However, I am willing to claim credit for this new move. I hope you will make the best of it."

"We certainly shall," said Will. "But you are not going to leave us?"

"I ought to be in Richmond now."

"You will do me a great favor by remaining with me until I return to report to General Lee."

CHAPTER XI.

A DARING CHARGE.

Clements, the scout, was apparently well pleased with the recognition of his services, tendered him by Will. It was gratifying indeed to know that his work was well appreciated.

But he looked grave indeed as he considered Will's proposition that he remain with him until he should finish his work in this part of the country.

"I am sorry, Prentiss," he said. "I like you and your boys. I would like to stay by you, but I fear that I cannot give you the promise. Duty demands that I return to Richmond at once."

Will's face showed disappointment.

"I am sorry, Clements," he said. "I feel that we need your skilled services. But if it is true that duty demands your return I can say no more."

"Oh, it is not so serious," said the scout with a laugh. "I shall see you later in the campaign. I shall certainly follow your career with the greatest of interest. I predict success and fame for you and your brave company."

"I thank you," replied Will. "Now I will hasten to execute your advice in regard to the next manoeuvres against the enemy."

They galloped back to the Farley House. Will at once ordered his boys into the saddle. The guns were limbered up and the guards mounted the horses and the gunners the caissons.

The six hundred cavalymen sent by General Stuart were ordered to fall in for an advance. The troop rode away with the light battery galloping behind.

But, by this time, scouts had begun to come in and brought information concerning the Union force.

It was learned that they were a force of Union infantry which had been stationed at an outpost on the Pamunkey.

"I was in their camp on that river," said one of the scouts, "when a dispatch reached them, apparently from General Heintzelman, telling them that Richmond had fallen and that they should at once march hither. That is their objective point."

For a moment Will was puzzled.

Then like a flash the revelation came to him and he cried:

"I have it! It is Stuart's game to entrap them. That is why he sent me the reinforcements. He means to cut them off and force them to surrender."

Clements' face showed that his belief was the same.

"You are right," he declared. "It is one of Stuart's clever stratagems. No doubt he sent the dispatch himself."

This conviction was a startling one. But just then the clatter of hoofs sounded and a horseman came dashing up. He wore the insignia of Stuart's cavalry.

He saluted and exclaimed:

"I am from General Stuart. I want to see Captain Prentiss."

"Right here," declared Will.

The orderly drew an envelope from the breast of his blouse and handed it to Will. The young captain took it and broke the seal.

What he read was startling.

"My dear Prentiss: At the present moment I am on the banks of Goose Creek, just south of the Pamunkey. I have managed by a ruse to send a division of five thousand men, who were holding an outpost on this river under General Jack Wade, on a wild goose chase toward Richmond. If possible, do not attack them until they are a few miles below your present position. Then fall upon their left flank. I have heard of your clever handling of Clifford and I congratulate you. I have made plans to fall on Wade's regiments from the rear. I will communicate with you again at the earliest opportunity. Yours,

STUART."

Will saluted the orderly and said:

"Report to General Stuart that his orders shall be obeyed."

The orderly galloped away. Will now felt much relieved. He had a definite plan of action and was ready to follow it.

He drew his men off to the north and took up a position on a wooded hill more than two miles away.

The trees on this eminence shielded him from view and he could on the other hand watch the progress of General Wade's regiments. In the distance he saw the lines of blue rapidly debouching upon the level country beyond and extending toward Savage's and the road to Richmond.

He knew the impulse that was animating the soldiers in blue, so eagerly pressing forward to take part in the supposed triumphal march into the capital of the Confederacy.

Bitter, indeed, would be their disappointment when they should learn that it was a hoax and that they had been very cleverly entrapped.

But Will saw that Stuart's project to entrap the Union regiments would be no easy bit of work. Although he had a force much larger, numerically, it was cavalry, and not so well fitted to make successful attack. The Union soldiers had it in their power to make a most stubborn battle.

Clements had taken his leave. The skilful scout had ridden away toward Richmond. Will was left to his own judgment and resource.

And events were soon to prove that he had a serious contract on his hands.

For some time the Grays and their allies from the hill-top watched the march of the Union regiments. Finally they had passed into the distance down the Richmond road.

Will sprung into his saddle.

The time for action had arrived. He was not slow in

seizing it. His little command dashed away to skirt the left flank of the Union force in compliance with Stuart's orders.

Fred Randolph rode beside Will. The young lieutenant's face was serious.

"What do you think of this enterprise, Will?" he asked.

Will shook his head.

"It is not for me to criticize the orders of a superior," he said.

"I understand. But I'll wager you don't like the job."

"Not exactly that," said Will. "But I am afraid that we are going to have a terrible hard fight."

"There you are!" cried Fred. "I am well satisfied of it. I tell you Stuart will sacrifice a good many men to drive this Yankee fox into a corner. I don't believe he can do it at that."

Will was silent a moment.

"That is not for you or I to question," he said. "General Stuart may have perfected his plans so well that he will succeed with the greatest of ease."

"I hope so."

The Confederate troop, with the artillery in the rear, kept along behind the rolling hills for several miles until they had once gotten ahead of the Union line of march. Will now decided to attack.

He selected his ground and made his plans accordingly. He extended his troop of horses in three lines, each behind the other, or more properly speaking, in three parallel lines. The artillery was stationed upon a little rise which enabled them to train their guns upon the opposite side of the narrow valley, through which the Union troops must march.

The order was that the artillery should open fire when the Union's advance got up even with the muzzles of the cannon. This would be a signal to the cavalry to dash at the enemy on the left flank.

The troop rode half a mile north of the position of the battery. They were drawn up in lines in the shade of a growth of oaks.

All was now in readiness.

From their position they could see the Union line passing in a steady procession. All that was now necessary was to listen for the battery's first fire.

It seemed an age to the excited cavalymen that they sat there.

"What's the matter with the battery?" was the query that suddenly went around. Will grew anxious.

"Humph!" exclaimed Fred, "this will be a rear attack before we get through."

But just then the distant roar of the guns smote upon the air. Shot and shell went ploughing through the ranks of blue. Will now rose in his stirrups and shouted:

"Forward, Grays! forward, all! Gallop!"

Away dashed the little troop. When they came in sight of the foe they were not two hundred yards away.

It was remarkable with what agility the Union infantry deployed in line of battle.

The regiments quickly rushed into irregular line, seek-

ing the corners of a rail fence. The entire command almost instantly resolved itself into a vast hollow square.

The little handful of cavalry rushing down upon them seemed pigmy indeed. Their chances seemed slight.

Will counted the chances of his charge and he saw that it must result in a heavy loss of men.

Furthermore, the loss their charge could inflict upon the well-protected infantry was inconsiderable. It was in his mind a foolish and hair-brained attempt.

But Will Prentiss knew that it must be done. He had received orders and they must be obeyed.

Down went the little force of cavalry. They looked more formidable than might be supposed as they burst from the corner of the woods.

But now the muskets of the infantry spoke. Volleys of musket balls filled the air and for a moment the cavalry line was in confusion.

Horses went down and riders with them. But the main line of the little brigade kept on and reached the rail fence.

There was a terrific impact and a crash as the fence was swept away and the body of horsemen went down full upon the bayonets of the Union infantry.

The scene that followed was one that baffled human description.

Men and horses were intermingled in one terrible fighting wriggling mass. Sabres flashed in the air and clashed on bayonets. Men and horses went down and were trampled by others behind them. In the very forefront of all was Will Prentiss, slashing and fighting as an example to his men.

Wild hurrahs burst from the throats of the Confederate cavalymen. They swept the blue line back, cut their way through with fury and then began to roll it up.

A moment more and they had emerged from the awful melee and were riding parallel with the line of the foe. Will saw that he had turned the flank of the Union force and he now withdrew to the protection of a little ridge of land within easy musket shot.

Here the Grays dismounted and began to use their carbines. The fighting waxed exceedingly hot.

A score of the troop had been left dead on the field. Of these, however, only a third were Virginia Grays. On the whole the charge had been a success for double the number of the foe had fallen, and that part of the line was in much confusion.

Ringling cheers went up from the throats of the Grays.

CHAPTER XII.

A DEFEAT.

It was certainly a wild and dashing exploit. Colonel Chauncey, of Stuart's men, gripped Will's hand.

"Boy, you were born for a cavalry leader," he cried. "Stuart himself couldn't have brought his men through as you did yours, right there. You drew off at just the right moment."

"Thank you, Colonel Chauncey!" said Will politely. "I'm afraid you give me too much credit."

"You deserve it all and more. Hello! What's that?"

The colonel put his glass to his eyes and scanned a distant ridge of land. The sight he beheld drew excited exclamations from him:

"It is a Confederate guidon! They are cavalry! Do you see? They are swarming over the ridge! Hurrah! it is Stuart!"

"Stuart! Stuart!"

The cry went rippling from the throats of all. Then mad cheers rent the air.

Over the ridges swarmed hundreds of gray cavalrymen. Cannon came galloping up and unlimbered. They soon joined their fire to that of Will's little battery of three guns.

Stuart's force seemed legion as they deployed for a mile or more around the high land of the valley. They partly encircled the position of the Union infantry.

The noise of the battle now was terrific. The ground shook with the roar of the guns. The Union battery was engaged in a hot duel with the Confederates.

The scene now became a most enlivening one. For a while the batteries thundered and the muskets and carbines rattled.

Then suddenly all along the opposite side the flashing sabres of cavalrymen glinted in the sunlight. Lines of horsemen came sweeping into view.

Will drew a sharp breath.

"Now we shall see something, Fred!" he cried. "A cavalry charge on a grand scale. See! General Stuart leads it in person."

This was seen to be true. The well-known figure of the great cavalry leader was seen in front of his men, waving his sabre and leading them on.

It was a scene surpassing the imagination, that dense column of men in gray well mounted, presenting a forest of glittering sabres sweeping down like a fierce avalanche with a force which it seemed no human power could withstand.

Fascinated beyond expression Will Prentiss and his little command gazed upon that spectacle.

It was of short duration.

The fire of the Union infantry was concentrated upon the oncoming tide of men and horses. Destructive volleys swept its front line.

Men and horses went down in dying, struggling heaps. Still the mighty tide, the forest of sabres came on.

Then they reached the line of blue. There was an awful impact, a fierce intermingling of foes. Awful was that spectacle of carnage.

But the resistless line of cavalry kept on, surged through the blue line and turned as if on a pivot to roll up the flank.

It looked as if the day was Stuart's. For a moment the tide of cavalry seemed to be completely smothering the Union troops. It kept on and on.

Sabres were flashing in air and muskets blazed. Then as the smoke lifted a little Will beheld an appalling scene,

A solid wall of bristling bayonets had suddenly sprung up in the path of Stuart. Like waves of the ocean upon a solid rock the line of cavalry broke upon this wall.

Broke and were hurled back. Awful was the slaughter on both sides. But the stubborn wall of infantry would not yield.

Stuart's column glanced from its impregnable face and scattered in a sweeping drive to the other side of the valley.

Then a comparative hush seemed to fall upon the valley. The cavalry in great detachments sought the higher ridges again.

The great charge had been made and now it was possible to count the results. It is safe to say that it was a bitter disappointment to Stuart.

The reasoning of Clements, the scout, had been well verified. The infantry had vastly the better of the argument.

The advantage had been wholly upon their side. Their destructive volleys had decimated the cavalry ranks frightfully.

For every dead Union soldier on that field there were four Confederates. Their line had stood like a wall.

It was a lesson which Will was not likely to forget.

There came a lull in the battle now. The Union general, Wade, had begun to draw in his lines and concentrate his force.

On the other hand, Stuart bruised and wounded, himself, was trying to reorganize his men behind the ridge.

It was a sadly shattered force which he surveyed. A dark cloud overshadowed his face. He was bitterly disappointed.

Will Prentiss now left his company in Fred's hands and rode over to see the great Confederate general.

General Stuart silently took Will's hand. When he finally spoke it was with a sad ring in his voice:

"We are having bad luck, my boy."

"Yes," replied Will, "but there is sure to be a turning."

"There ought to be. But we could make no stronger effort to break their line than that."

"That is true, General Stuart. But another attempt might win."

Stuart shook his head slowly.

"Only think of the brave fellows we left down there," he said. "It will take a conscription to replace them. We are shedding the best blood of the South. Those Yankees are like a rock."

"It is the old story of Kleber and the Mamelukes in Egypt," said Will. "The famous French square broke the power of the greatest cavalry in the world."

"Yet, we outnumber them two to one and ought to break them up."

For a time Stuart seemed to be plunged in bitter reflection. Finally, however, he aroused from it.

"You have done well, Prentiss," he said. "You have fought bravely and your aid has been much to me. I would like to include your troop in my command. But I have received instructions from General Lee to send you back at once."

Will's face lit up with surprise.

"You have heard from General Lee?"

"Yes."

"Then—he orders us back to his army?"

"He does."

"Have you heard the result of the battle at Malvern?"

"Yes. We were unable to dislodge the Union troops. They have held their line intact and are rapidly falling back to Harrison's Landing. It looks as if they would safely escape now."

"That is too bad."

"That is true. When we had them right in our clutches here we ought to have destroyed them. But it cannot be helped. They have learned a lesson though, and probably the next time they come down here to take Richmond, they will come better prepared."

"At least with less confidence."

"Just so."

"Then I suppose General Lee will be at liberty to turn and meet the advance of Pope now."

"That will not be necessary."

"Why?" asked Will in surprise.

"I have sent couriers north as far as Fredericksburg. I have learned that Pope's plans have been blocked by the retreat of McClellan."

Will gave a cry of amazement.

"That is astonishing," he cried. "We believed that Pope would advance on his own hook."

"His order to advance has been countermanded. McClellan has been ordered back to Washington. The Union authorities are going to adopt an entirely new plan of campaign."

This was certainly news to Will Prentiss. It meant much to him. It seemed certainly like a great victory in more ways than one for the Confederacy.

"What do you propose to do in the present case?" asked Will. "You will not give up your attempt to capture this force of Union troops?"

"By no means!" declared Stuart. "I am defeated on the first assault. But even if they have discovered the deception and try to fall back I shall pursue and harass them all the way."

"Can you not secure reinforcements?"

"Hardly, in time! No, I must go on as I usually have, cutting off detachments and destroying their supplies. I can beat them in open fight. I am well satisfied of that."

"Then you will not order another charge?"

"Hardly," said General Stuart with a shrug of his shoulders. "I am no Mameluke. But you understand now, Prentiss, what you are to do. Detach your company and ride back to Lee. Give him this communication from me."

Stuart placed a letter in Will's hands. The boy-captain saluted and said:

"Your orders shall be obeyed, General Stuart. I will return to General Lee at once."

Will rode back to his own position on the little ridge. He explained matters to Colonel Chauncey. Then the Grays were detached and mounting, prepared to ride away.

Will was loth to leave the spot with the battle undecided.

But he knew that Stuart would not attack again. He would carry out the purpose he proposed and harass the retreat of General Wade. That the Union general would rapidly retreat there was no doubt.

So it happened that the Grays started away on their return to General Lee's headquarters. They were soon out upon the road which led to the fords of the Chickahominy.

At a rapid gallop they rode for hours. It was in the middle of the afternoon that they finally came to the ford. They crossed and stood on the south bank of the little river.

Will now had no fear of encountering any Union foe. They were no doubt far on their way to Harrison's Landing.

The country before Richmond was well freed from them. Will hoped devoutly that it might be forever.

Still on they rode.

They passed deserted farm-houses and met troops of negroes and stragglers at every turn.

The entire country presented the aspect of a region that had lately been devastated by armies. All was desolation and ruin.

The evening shades were falling when they reached the rear of the Confederate army just beyond Malvern Hill. Will now called a halt and the Grays went into bivouac.

CHAPTER XIII.

GENERAL LEE'S PLAN.

As the Grays halted for bivouac the region about Malvern presented to them a thrilling aspect. The marks of a terrible battle were on every hand.

In the light of dusk this was much enhanced. On a distant hillside were pathetic mounds, marking the last resting place of many brave soldiers.

As soon as the Grays were in bivouac Will mounted his horse and rode down the long line of the army in quest of General Lee.

He was finally directed to a small eminence where a number of white tents were pitched. He was halted before one of them by an orderly.

"I wish to see General Lee," said Will.

"The general is busy."

"My business is important."

"What is your name?"

"Captain Will Prentiss of the Virginia Grays."

The orderly disappeared in the tent. It was not long before he reappeared and said:

"General Lee will see you."

Will entered the tent. At a table, with a handsome sword resting across his knee, was General Lee. Beside him sat General Magruder.

Both regarded Will with eager interest.

"Prentiss, I am more than glad to see you," said General

Lee warmly. "Stuart has written me all about you and the brave work you have done."

"I am afraid he has given me more credit than I deserve, sir," said Will. "I have simply tried to do my duty."

"What is more you have accomplished it," said General Magruder. "If all our officers did that the cause of the Confederacy would be easily won. Eh, Lee?"

"You are right," replied Lee warmly. "Now, Prentiss, I am going to ask you some questions. Where did you go? How far north?"

"Almost to the Pamunkey River," replied Will.

"Oh! did you run across any of the Yankees up that way?"

"Yes. We had several sharp fights with them. I have lost a number of men."

"Were they in heavy force?"

"The heaviest force we encountered was five thousand under General Wade."

"Oh, yes!" said Magruder. "He is the chap who has held that advanced outpost on the Pamunkey."

"Is that so?" said General Lee. "Well, Stuart has more men. He ought to drive him."

"A fierce engagement was fought to-day," said Will. "We have just come from there. I am sorry to say that General Stuart suffered a repulse."

"A repulse!" exclaimed both generals.

"Yes, he still holds his position though. He managed to decoy Wade from his intrenchments on the Pamunkey by a bogus dispatch from Heintzelman to the effect that Richmond had fallen and he must march thither at once."

"He was attacked in a valley, but the Union infantry formed a square and made a most desperate resistance."

"Humph!" said General Lee. "Did he charge upon them?"

"Yes."

"I don't wonder then that he was repulsed. It is hard to break an infantry square. In my mind the only place for a cavalry charge is when the enemy's line is open or disorganized."

"That is right," said Magruder. "But Stuart is a dare-devil."

"It is possible to succeed, but more likely to fail. Well, Prentiss, what of the advance of Pope? Saw you anything of his advance guard?"

"Nothing, sir!" replied Will. "General Stuart sent scouts even to Fredericksburg, and they report that Pope's enterprise has been abandoned."

"Ha!" cried Lee exultantly. "Do you hear that, Magruder? I tell you we have given them a good lesson. They'll hardly venture to attack Richmond again, right away."

"To tell the truth, I am rather disappointed that Pope didn't come," said General Magruder.

"Why?"

"If we had got him down here we would have destroyed his army."

"Well, I believe you," said General Lee. "But I have faith that this war will not last long. We shall assert ourselves so strongly, that the north will be compelled to recog-

nize our rights to independence. It will mean a great saving of life."

"Let us pray for such an event," said General Magruder. "Well, Prentiss, you have done noble work. As matters are at present, it looks as if McClellan is bound to give us the slip."

"Yes," agreed General Lee. "Our own army, after this hard week of constant fighting, is pretty well disorganized. McClellan has an impregnable defence at Harrison's Landing. From the first the enemy has outnumbered us, and yet we have kept them on the run. But, while we have inflicted heavy losses upon them, we have suffered losses ourselves. It is therefore necessary to reorganize and recuperate our army before entering upon a further campaign. I am now considering a plan for a sortie into Maryland. Our Congress has been holding out the warmest of inducements to the Maryland people to join the Confederacy. With them arrayed on our side, it brings our dominion to the very door of the Union capital and there could no longer remain a vestige of hope that the North could triumph. Victory and peace and liberty would be ours."

General Lee drew a map from his pocket and spread it on the table.

"Gentlemen," he said, "this matter is strictly confidential. I have discussed this plan with President Davis and we are united in the opinion that it is the best possible at present. We know that the Washington authorities are very much disturbed over the failure of McClellan's attempts to take Richmond. It is our time to take advantage of their weakness."

"I propose, therefore, to march north through the Shenandoah Valley to Harper's Ferry and thence into Maryland. The people of that State will rise as we march through and swell our ranks with volunteers. Our army should be a third larger by the time we reach Washington. Then for the great blow which should bring the North to terms. Once Washington is invested I will march a column to Philadelphia."

Will listened to this gigantic project with awe. He was silent some moments. General Lee was busy making corrections on the map.

General Magruder broke the silence first.

"Well, Lee," he said, "I believe in that plan myself. But I believe the blow could be struck direct and from the shoulder. I see no reason why it could not."

"What do you mean?" asked Lee.

"Let me show you! Here we are at present but a short distance from Richmond, with the army of McClellan about to embark on its return to Washington. If we could march at once north to Fredericksburg and hurl Pope back we would stand a good chance of getting to Alexandria and recovering all the ground we lost before Beauregard went west."

General Lee shook his head.

"It is impracticable," he said.

"Why?"

"In the first place our army needs rest and recuperation. Before that could be accomplished McClellan will have re-

inforced Pope. If we drove them back from Fredericksburg we would have to repeat McClellan's experience in coming here by fighting the foe in his own country, well fortified and well supplied, while our army would be vastly weakened and would stand the chance of almost certain repulse, if not extinction."

General Magruder's face underwent a change.

"Lee," he said with final conviction, "you are right. Your sortie through Maryland is the best plan."

"I think so," said the great Confederate general. "You see we shall be marching through a region as yet untrod by armies, a fertile and friendly country at a time of year when the harvests are bountiful and all our needs may be easily supplied. I do not see how that can spell failure."

"It cannot!" cried Magruder enthusiastically. "I am heartily in sympathy with the plan."

"We cannot as yet embark upon it," said General Lee. "There is much to be done. The army must be put upon a more efficient footing. But in the meantime there is a small enterprise which I have thought I might assign to you, Prentiss."

Will looked up eagerly.

"Indeed, General Lee," he said, "I shall be very glad to assume it."

"Are your boys in condition for a hard ride?"

"I think they are, sir."

"This is an enterprise attended with much risk. It means a dash to the very gates of Fredericksburg. You may not return."

Will looked at the great general whose grave and kindly face beamed upon him.

"General Lee," he said, "the lives of my boys and my own life belong to my country. I shall go where you send me."

The general averted his face a moment. When he looked up he placed a package of papers in Will's hand.

"General Stuart will probably find enough to occupy him with the pursuit of Wade," he said. "These papers I want you to deliver to General Small at Hanover Court House. From thence I want you to ride as near Fredericksburg as you can and learn all that you are able to concerning the position of the enemy's forces at that point. I shall give you a week in which to perform this feat. Then you will report to me at Richmond."

Will arose and saluted:

"General Lee," he said, "your orders shall be obeyed without delay."

"I wish you good fortune, Prentiss."

"I thank you, general."

Will left the tent hurriedly. He was filled with the importance of the matters which had just been discussed.

When he reached the spot where the Grays were bivouacked he met Fred Randolph, who had been waiting for him.

"Fred," cried the boy-captain, "I have much to tell you. There is important work before us."

"Oh!" cried the young lieutenant. "The boys will be glad to hear that."

"I think they will."

"They are already pining for something to do, though they have hardly been an hour in camp."

"They need have no fear of a lack of excitement hereafter," said Will. Then he told Fred of the enterprise given him by General Lee.

Fred listened with interest.

"That is capital!" he cried. "We are still to remain in the saddle."

"Yes!"

"The trip will take us north as far as Fredericksburg. We shall have to depend wholly upon our own endeavors, without any hope of reinforcement."

"That is the size of it," said Will.

CHAPTER XIV.

EXCITING INCIDENTS.

"Well!" cried Fred, "it is necessary to procure more ammunition for our carbines. Our saddles are in bad repair."

"I have an order from General Lee on the commissary and supply department. We shall attend to that in the morning."

"We will not start until daybreak then?"

"No."

"Then I think you and I had better get a little sleep. There'll be hard work enough for us to-morrow."

"Yes, there is nothing that we can do until then."

Accordingly the two boys turned in and were soon in the land of dreams. They slept as tired soldier boys should, soundly and well.

But they were astir at an early hour the next morning. Will at once proceeded to make arrangements for the great ride.

When the Grays knew what was before them they were overjoyed.

The monotony of camp-life was not to their liking. The promise of exciting adventure and lively scenes was welcome indeed.

In a few hours they were ready. Mounted and fully equipped they made a fine appearance. As they galloped out of camp Will glanced up and saw General Lee and his staff not far away.

The great general had seen them also and now waved a salute to them. The Grays in answer waved their swords and cheered.

Then they set their horses' heads to the north and galloped beyond the picket lines upon a mission fraught with deadly danger and wildest adventure.

The Grays took roads which led them within a few miles of the scene of Stuart's battle with Wade.

But, as it was wholly unlikely that they would find the Confederate raider or any of his men there, they did not turn from their course.

But Will and Fred kept an ear out for the sound of guns. Once they thought they detected cannonading far to the west, but it soon died out.

On rode the Grays until nightfall came. They drew rein for a bivouac in the yard of a deserted farmhouse.

The Grays quickly corralled their horses and at once proceeded to make camp-fires. They found some hay and fodder for their horses in the barn and for this they were exceedingly grateful.

So much had the country been raided that a grasshopper could hardly find subsistence. So the boys thought they were in luck.

The owner of the farm had long since taken his belongings and fled to Richmond. The place, like many others, was fast going to ruin.

The boys had just finished their arrangements for the bivouac, when, as Will was directing the posting of the picket guard, he heard a rustle in some bushes near him.

In an instant he pulled out his pistol and covered the shrub.

"Who is there?" he demanded sternly. "Come out, or I'll fire!"

There was a whimper and a little cry of fear. Then a negro lad crept out. He was the picture of abject terror.

"Oh, massa! me only a po' cullud boy! Don' yo' kill dis chile. I neber done nobody no harm."

"What's that, you black scamp!" cried Will. "Where did you come from?"

"Ober yender!" whimpered the boy. "Dere am de Yankees. Ise only a po' brack boy! Don' kill dis chile!"

"Straighten up, you little coward," said Will sharply. "Nobody is going to hurt you. Tell me the truth. Did you say the Yankees were over there?"

"Oh, yes, massa! Dey am lots of dem. Great heap ob dem! I want to go back to old massa an' I neber go away no mo'."

"I see! You ran away from your master, didn't you?"

"Oh, yes, but Ise gwine back," said the little negro tremblingly.

Will's voice softened and he spoke kindly.

"See here, my boy," he said. "What is your name?"

"Ise brack Jim, sah."

"Well, Jim, whose boy are you? Who is your master?"

"Cap'n Blockington ob de Rosebud Plantation, sah!"

"Oh! I know Captain Blockington. Well, Jim, I don't believe you are so bad as you look. Tell me where your master is now?"

"Oh, he done cla'r out an' go to Richmond, sah! When I heah ob de Yankees comin' I done run away to go wif dem, sah, but I don' want to go wif dem no mo'. I wants to go back to de plantation. Dis nigger neber go way no mo'."

"Jim," said Will, "your master was kind to you, was he not?"

"Yes, sah!"

"You are only one of many who will be sorry when these old plantation homes are broken up, which will be the case if the Yankees win. But that cannot be helped now. Tell me the truth, Jim. How many Yankees are there over there?"

The negro's eyes rolled.

"Dere am a big heap of dem," he declared. "Mo' dan you hab heah."

"Are they mounted?"

"Sah! What's dat?"

"Have they horses?"

"Yas, sah! I done reckon dey be Yankee cavalry. Dey am jes' right ober de hilltop."

Will looked at the horizon and up at the sky. Dusk was at hand, but there would not be absolute darkness for some time.

"Jim, I want you to show me where the Yankees are," he said.

"A' right, sah!" agreed the negro boy.

He led the way into the thicket and Will followed him. It was not long before they skirted a little ravine and the boy-captain saw the waters of a creek below.

On the banks of this creek there gleamed a camp-fire. He saw horses tethered in the woods and group of blue-clad soldiers lounging about.

From the best deductions he could make Will adjudged this as a scouting party, intent probably upon some expedition similar to his own.

He at once grew deeply interested.

He drew as near as he could and watched them. They seemed as unconscious of the proximity of the Grays as the Grays had been of them.

Will noted their captain, a fine appearing man with a pointed beard. He wondered what it was now best for him to do.

Ordinarily he would not have hesitated. Had a great battle or some important movement of the armies been impending, Will would not have hesitated a moment.

He would have instantly surrounded and endeavored to force the Yankee force to surrender. For there would have been the probability that they carried dispatches of importance or were bent upon some mission of noteworthy sort.

But now with the issues of the campaign practically decided for a time and both armies in statu quo the situation was vastly altered.

He pondered the advisability of interfering with the foe. He was himself eager to get away upon his northern mission.

If he should pause here to engage in what might be perhaps a desultory fight with a force fully equal and fully as brave as his own, he might meet with a delay that would involve the defeat of his whole project.

Will pondered the matter seriously. He finally reached a decision.

He made his way back over the ridge, taking the negro boy with him. When he reached the camp he acquainted Fred with what he had seen.

"The deuce!" exclaimed the young lieutenant, "that is bad! What shall we do?"

"I think we had better avoid any encounter with them. Even if we forced them to surrender what should we gain? What would we do with the prisoners?"

"You are right!" agreed Fred. "The best thing we can do is to go ahead and leave them alone."

"So I think."

"But—is there not danger of their discovering us and making an attack?"

"If they do, we will simply defend ourselves."

"That is right."

"I think though that it is a good idea to put out the camp-fires."

"I will give the order."

The camp-fires therefore were put out. Heavy picket guards were established. All that night the two companies of soldiers, one Union and the other Confederate, slept with only the ridge between them.

And one did not know that the other was there. With the early break of day the Grays silently got into saddle and dashed away.

The negro boy, Jim, had vanished during the night. Where he went Will never knew. But he had served the Grays a good turn.

Now the little company of Confederates struck into a road which led them toward Hanover Court House. It was there that Will was to meet General Small and deliver to him the message from General Lee.

As they drew nearer the Confederate outpost Will rode in advance and kept a sharp lookout. Suddenly he saw the Confederate picket guard at the brow of a small hill just ahead.

Will rode forward boldly. The picket seeing them coming had called out the guard.

As the sergeant and his men appeared, Will halted the Grays and rode forward. He saluted and answered the hail at once.

"I am Captain Will Prentiss of the Virginia Grays. I come from General Lee with dispatches for General Small."

The sergeant of the guard said:

"Dismount and accompany us to General Small's headquarters."

Will obeyed. He gave the bridle rein of his horse to the picket. Then in the midst of the file of men he marched away.

In a short while they had reached the tent of General Small. Will had heard much about this officer.

He knew that he was a strict martinet and that his whole military life had been marred by this very same strict adherence to red-tape.

For nearly thirty minutes Will was kept waiting before the tent of this stickler for military etiquette. When he was finally admitted the impression created was that experienced by one ushered into the presence of some dignitary of the Orient.

General Small did not arise from his chair and scowled at Will as he advanced with a simple salute.

"Hats off in the presence of a superior, sir," snapped the martinet. Will removed his cap and saluted again.

"General Small," he began.

"What is your business?" interrupted the hot-headed little commander, growing very red in the face.

"I have dispatches for you from General Lee."

"Well, let's have them. Don't keep me waiting all day. It is very evident that your regiment lacks discipline."

"We owe allegiance to no regiment," replied Will sharply. Then he bit his lip with vexation at the reply:

"What? A major-general in captain's uniform, eh?" sneered Small. "A very clever act, I must say! Where is your commission?"

"General Small——"

"Silence, sir!"

"I am here to deliver you these dispatches from General Lee," persisted Will. "Here they are, sir! I wish you good-day!"

"Stop!"

Will instinctively turned back.

"Well, sir!"

The Confederate general was purple with hot temper. He half rose from his chair.

"This insufferable impertinence in a subordinate is unbearable!" he cried. "I have a mind to put you under arrest."

Will now in his turn grew angry. Forbearance had ceased to be a virtue.

"I defy you to attempt such a thing!" he said hotly. "You cannot exceed your authority and there is a limit to that, even if you are a major-general."

"Indeed!" sneered Small. "You do need discipline. You are of the rank of captain. You are a regular of the Confederate army and——"

"No, sir! I am a volunteer. What is more, my company is an independent organization and I have my papers from President Davis to that effect."

CHAPTER XV.

ON TO FREDERICKSBURG.

Small's mean ferret eyes snapped with baffled rage. He seemed at a loss for an answer to this assertion.

"Let me see your papers!"

Will unbuttoned his coat and drew them from an inner pocket. He had his commission and that of his company. He laid these papers before Small.

"Read them!" he said coldly.

Small glanced them over critically. He then flung them down. Will took them up and replaced them in his pocket.

"Are you satisfied?" he asked.

"I am satisfied that the present volunteer system is all wrong," said the martinet tartly. "There can be no discipline or good service under it."

"General Small," said Will sharply, "I would like to give you a bit of advice."

"Advice from a subordinate! Bless my soul! I——"

"Wait, sir! If you would think less of discipline and more of efficient practical service you would win more battles."

This was a sharp fling. Only a week ago Small had been ignominiously repulsed in an encounter with a Union force of raiders.

His face grew sickly yellow. He could make no reply. There was one certainty that he had for once met a man who could not be bullied or cowed by his rough tactics.

Will turned on his heel. At the tent entrance he said:

"I have fulfilled my mission, sir. I have delivered General Lee's dispatches to you. I wish you good-day!"

Will went back to his troop. He mounted and gave the order:

"Forward! Quick trot!"

The Grays left the camp of General Small behind them. Will lived to hear, not a great while later, of the removal of this stickler for discipline by President Davis for "the good of the service."

The Grays galloped on for a few miles. Suddenly a distant sound arose upon the air.

It was comprehensive to all and gave Will a thrill of interest. It was the shriek of a locomotive whistle.

The boy-captain knew what it meant. The Fredericksburg Railroad was not far away. A train was approaching.

Impulse prompted the boy-captain to turn his horses' heads in that direction. The Grays leaped their horses over the rail fences and rode toward the railroad.

As they drew near they were given a great start. They saw a force of armed men suddenly rush upon the embankment and begin to tear up the rails.

Will stared at them for a moment and then gave a shout: "Boys!" he cried, "they are Union guerrillas! Get after them!"

It needed no further hint or urging. The Grays, with a cheer, spurred their horses forward.

The guerrillas saw them coming and desisted in their work. They instantly massed behind the embankment and opened fire.

Will saw that their force was fully as strong as his own and it would be folly to rush into their fire, protected as they were.

So he swung his troop around to the right and gained a road which here crossed the track.

The Grays were here somewhat protected by a side embankment. Behind this they now rode and dismounted. The horses were led back out of range.

The train could be heard in the distance. It was coming from the direction of Fredericksburg. Whether it contained Union or Confederate troops was a question.

Will, however, sent a sergeant down the track with a flag of warning. Then he led the Grays in a charge over the embankment.

The guerrillas fired and then broke and fled. The Grays pursued them into the woods beyond.

Will then ordered the recall sounded. They came back just in time to see the train come to a stop not a hundred yards away.

There were a locomotive and nine cars. It was a construction train, carrying rails and ties and lumber for the

repairing of bridges. A large force of workingmen were on board.

Will met the conductor who was much surprised.

"The track seemed all clear along here," he said. "We came up from Richmond and have been almost to Fredericksburg, repairing the track. It is lucky you came along as you did!"

"Yes," agreed Will. "You say you have been almost into Fredericksburg?"

"Yes."

"Did you see anything of the Yankees?"

"Yes, we were fired on by a troop of them. We went no further after that. I thought it would be safer to keep away."

"No doubt you were wise," said Will, to whom a sudden thought had come. "Now, I'll tell you of a plan I have just conceived. We are anxious to get down as near Fredericksburg as possible. I want to ascertain the strength of the Union force there. Will you take us aboard your train and——"

"Don't do it, Captain Prentiss," said a voice at Will's shoulder. He turned and gave a great start of surprise.

A man who had come up the embankment stood before him and holding out his hand.

"Clements!" cried Will excitedly. "I am glad to see you."

It was the scout. He had been to Richmond and back. In a few words he told the young captain many important facts.

"It is not safe for you to venture further toward Fredericksburg at present," he said. "I advise you to draw off and play a waiting game for a day or two."

"Your advice is always good, Clements," said Will. "I shall have to accept it. But promise me that you will stay with us for a while. We need your aid."

"I will stay with you," said Clements. "I am going into Fredericksburg later as a spy. If you wish and you think it safe you may accompany me."

"Grand!" cried Will with delight. "We have a spare horse for you. Let us ride on."

A few moments later they were riding away and ever working nearer Fredericksburg. How they succeeded in their evolution about the Union stronghold and what were their thrilling adventures we will narrate in another story.

THE END.

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